

A New Story, THE GOLDEN LURE, begins Next Week.

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"I MUST UPSET IT, IT IS OUR ONLY CHANCE!" MUTTERED FITZGERALD, FOR TO STOP THE HORSE SEEMED AN UTTER IMPOSSIBILITY.

HIS FATHER'S SIN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"It was a beautiful day," everyone said, "a beautiful day for December," but little of the beauty found its way to the shabby narrow street where poor Mrs. Montrose had found a quiet haven for herself and her children.

She was the widow of Charles Montrose, a Devonshire squire, who had speculated away the home of his fathers, the grand old deer-park which belonged to that home, and the fortune which had helped him to enjoy it. Then, when at least he ought to have faced the trouble he had brought upon his family, he made his escape through an accident in the hunting-field, and went to a better world, where there are neither bankruptcy courts

nor bills of change, and whither few of his creditors would have cared to follow him.

Mrs. Montrose was not a woman to sit down with her hands in her lap and cry, when there were children to take care of, and something important to be done. She was not a hard, practical woman, ready to turn her hand to anything, with a constitution of iron, and nerves that were content to be ignored; but she was a gentle, refined lady, whose blue blood gave her courage to brave the worst, and fortitude to bear it.

"Rhona, there is an invitation for you to spend Christmas at your uncle's," said Mrs. Montrose, looking up from the stocking she was darning, as the girl came into the room, her cheeks blooming from the fresh air outside.

"Sir Everard says the house is pretty full, but they will do their best to make you happy."

"Very kind, but nothing should induce me to go," untying her bonnet, and putting her hand fondly on her brother's, small, fair head, as he bent over a slate at the table.

"But, my dear, I think you must. He will be offended if you refuse."

"Why doesn't he ask you and little Jack? Then I would go, and be delighted."

"The house is full—he couldn't take us in," with gentle depreciation.

"Then why did he fill it?" her glorious eyes flashing scornfully.

"Isn't his brother's widow good enough to be asked to meet all the aristocracy in the land?"

"They mean no unkindness," said the widow, softly; "only you see, dear, I'm not so young as I was, and I'm a very dull companion."

"Never dull, dearest mother—only sad, as we all are sometimes," kneeling down by her and putting a fond arm round her neck.

"I hate people who do nothing but chatter and laugh."

"I hope you will meet some pleasant people who will make you laugh down at the Hall."

"Ishan't go!"

"Yes you will, to please me."

"But you can't want to get rid of me!" opening her eyes.

"Yes I do," with a smile. "You don't know how I long to get beyond this terribly narrow circle of ours. Now, it will be quite refreshing for you to have a glimpse of the best society and tell me all about it afterwards."

"But you will be so lonely without me," looking at her doubtfully.

"Nonsense! I shall have Jack to keep me company; and we shall be looking forward all the while to having you back."

"I should hate myself if I enjoyed it, and long to send all the goods things at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner to you and little Jack."

"Going away, Rhona?" said the boy, looking round, "mind you bring me something nice in your pocket."

"Would you like me to go?" reproachfully.

"Yes, if you bring me something nice, and come back quickly."

"There, you see, everyone wants you gone," said Mrs. Montrose, with a smile. "Now, how about your clothes? Your best dress is pretty good, but that one is rather shady. Your evening dresses you have scarcely worn, and with a few of my old jet ornaments will look quite respectable."

"Mother, I can't go," said Rhona, earnestly. "I should be quite miserable."

"Then be miserable, dear, for a few days—you won't mind it if it is to make me happier afterwards!"

"But you are so unselfish, mother. You never will think of yourself."

"Indeed, I am thinking of myself now. It will make quite a break in our lives, and be almost as good for me as for you. I shall love to think of you taking your proper place amongst our own people!" looking at her daughter's pretty face with motherly pride.

Mrs. Montrose gained her point in spite of Rhona's opposition; and one gloomy day towards the end of December a cab drove up to the door of 21, Elizabeth-street; two boxes which had seen better days were hoisted on to the top, with the assistance of the red-elbowed maid-of-all-work and the red-nosed driver, and, lastly, Rhona herself sprang in, her face wet with tears. A wave of the hand from the window, and then the cab rattled away over the stones, and Rhona Montrose had started on the journey which was to alter the whole current of her life.

Rosefield Hall was situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Yorkshire, and Farborough, its nearest station, was not reached till long after dusk.

Rhona looked timidly up and down the platform as she stepped out of the train, and asked the first porter she came across if anything had come for her from Sir Everard Montrose.

"Yes, miss, a big brake. You'll find it just outside. Is these your two boxes?" putting them on a truck. "Please to follow me, miss," and following him as well as she could, she came out into the yard, which was full of carriages.

"There's yourn, miss; these are to go into the cart."

To her dismay, she looked up and saw a large brake nearly filled with young men. The porter, noticing her hesitation, called out, "A lady for Rosefield 'All!'"

And instantly there was a scurry as to who should get out first to help her in. She was installed in the seat of honour at the top, and very thankful she felt for the darkness which hid her blushes.

"As our host and hostess are unfortunately absent," said a rich, full voice, just opposite to her. "I will take the liberty of introducing myself and all the rest. This is Eric Barrington, semi-attached to some outlying embassy, which never seems to see him; that is Captain Melyville, called the heavy dragoon—heavy by name, but not by nature; that is the Reverend Cuthbert Egerton, as good a fellow as ever walked upon earth—he's safe to be an arch-something in Heaven; this is Sir James Plowden, commonly 'little Jemmy,' who is warranted to kill a dozen people a year with his bad jokes."

"And then there's himself," broke in the man whom he had called "little Jemmy"—"Lord

Ronald Fitzgerald—a regular out-and-outer, but in what line I must leave you to find out."

"I thank you very much," said Rhona, shyly; "I shall feel as if I knew all about you before I arrived. My name is Rhona Montrose."

"Then you are a niece of Sir Everard's, and first cousin to the heiress of the West Riding!" said Lord Ronald, eagerly.

"Ye, first cousin, but there is a vast distance between us," with a sad little smile, as she thought of her home in Elizabeth-street.

"You enliven the south whilst Miss Montrose gilds the north!"

"I don't know about enlivening it, but we live in London."

"In London! Then after this visit we may meet again," said Lord Ronald, with a decided sensation of pleasure, as he found the sweet voice especially attractive, and he was sure the invisible had a face to match it.

"As if after this visit Miss Rhona Montrose would not have had enough of you, if not rather too much," interposed Sir James. "I assure you," turning to her, gravely, "a little bit of him goes a long way."

"But you never wish to see the end of him!" said Cuthbert Egerton, with his grave smile.

"Bravo Egerton! He always stands up for me before the world, but reserves to himself the privilege of pitching into me in private."

"So long as it was in private I shouldn't mind."

"But you would, excuse me, Miss Montrose. He makes me feel quite bad, as if I had been flogged, before he says a word; and after, I feel as if I had a blister on my backbone. I suppose you have been to Rosefield often before!"

"Never. My uncle used to stay with us down in Devonshire, but I have never seen either my aunt or cousin."

"Whew!" whistled Lord Ronald, expressively. "Then you have something before you."

"You might have said 'a pleasure' whilst you were about it."

"I might, Jemmy, but I didn't. Praine of Miss Montrose's relations might have seemed superfluous."

"It may be superfluous, but I should like to mention that Sir Everard is my ideal of a perfect gentleman," said Cuthbert Egerton, in his musical voice. "The type has been so spoiled by the eccentricities of modern fashion, that one is tempted to fear it may have died out."

"Thanks," said Eric Barrington, "in the name of myself and friends, I beg to thank you."

"Oh! you have the best of imitations, but not the real thing."

"I maintain that we have the real thing," said Barrington, testily.

"We are going to stay in the same house together," put in Sir James, quickly; "and by the end of ten days, Egerton will be able to judge whether we are cads or aristos."

"Miss Montrose shall decide," said Lord Ronald, "a woman can tell so much better than a man; and I feel sure that her verdict would be in my favour."

"But will she?" and the Baronet leant forward with a courteous bow.

"I beg your pardon," said Rhona, blushing vividly, in spite of the friendly darkness; "I thought you were speaking of my cousin."

"Not likely, when you are present and she is not. Will you undertake the responsibility of deciding who is the truest gentleman of us all?"

"Oh, no; I have had no experience. My idea of a gentleman might differ from yours."

"Shall I tell you mine?" said Lord Ronald; "the man who best does his duty to woman in every relation of life."

"But that is only one side of the question," objected Barrington.

"Never mind," said Egerton, quietly; "it will do fairly well as a test. Miss Montrose, as a stranger to us all, will be perfectly impartial."

"Today, but not to-morrow," murmured Lord Ronald, who had already set his heart on her conquest.

"And if she will graciously consent to take the trouble, we shall accept her verdict with the utmost respect."

Rhona bowed, shyly, rather overcome by the honour which was thrust upon her by such utter strangers. Much conversation ensued, which made the time pass so pleasantly that it was with a start of surprise that she found that the brake had arrived at its destination.

It was too dark to see much of the huge piles, which towered darkly above her head, but she was awed by its grandeur. The massive doors were thrown open, a crowd of footmen came on to the steps, but in front of them all stood a tall form, with a white head, and a cheery voice called out—

"Where's my niece, Rhona? Welcome to Rosefield Hall!"

It sounded so like her dear father's that her heart gave a bound, and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she recovered herself in a moment, as her uncle shook her heartily by the hand, and stooped to kiss her forehead.

CHAPTER II.

RHONA was ushered to her room at once, as dinner had already been retarded for the travellers. A maid appeared to offer her services, quickly opened her boxes, and took out all the requisites for her toilette. A simple, black grenadine, trimmed with lace and jet, set off the exquisite fairness of her skin, and one or two jet pins stuck about her pretty head made her soft curls look a more brilliant gold.

Feeling shy, but determined not to show it, she walked into the drawing-room at Rosefield with the quiet grace that might have belonged to a dethroned queen. Lady Montrose, a fashionable looking woman, with a faded face, gave her the tips of her fingers, and hoped she was not tired after her journey. Augusta Montrose, a plain girl with a long nose, a long neck, and an excessively long waist, nodded to her as she passed on Lord Ronald's arm and said, "How do? Tired?" over her shoulder.

Egerton raised his eyebrows with an amused smile, whilst Rhona looked after her cousin, her eyes wide open, her soft cheeks flushed.

"Rhona, let me introduce you to Sir James Plowden," said her aunt, affably. "Sir James Plowden—Miss Rhona Montrose. Will you take my place at dinner?"

The Baronet, short, broad-shouldered, and with a frank, pleasant face, made his best bow, and looked unfignedly pleased.

"Don't you think the others will say I am taking an unfair advantage? I narrowly missed a deaf dowager, but I told Lady Montrose that I had a sore throat and couldn't raise my voice."

"Then must we conduct our conversation in whispers!" asked Rhona, with a smile, as she took her place at the long, brilliantly-lighted table.

"No; safe out of danger I can do as I like." The dinner was exquisitely cooked, and Rhona thought of her mother and little Jack, as the daintiest dishes were handed in quick succession.

Hot-house flowers adorned the table in rich profusion; every gentleman seemed to have been provided with a button-hole, every lady except herself had a bouquet either in the front or at the side of her dress.

She thought of her mother's great love for them, and longed to be able to rile the Bohemian vases and send their contents up to Elizabeth-street carefully wrapped in cotton-wool. Mentally contrasting the shabby lodging and the splendid house, which was almost like a palace, she sighed.

"Please don't!" ejaculated Sir James.

"I was thinking how lovely the flowers were," she said, with a smile.

"And you have none of your own! What a shame—take mine," and before she could stop him he had unpinched the exquisite gardenia in his coat and laid it by the side of her plate.

"Please put it back again. I couldn't take it, really!"

"Not I; if you are too proud to accept it, it shall lie there till swept away with the crumbs," looking at it with an air of dogged resolution.

"Then I will take it, to save it from such



"Ignuminy." After smelling its delicious fragrance, she fixed it amongst the jet trimming in the front of her dress.

As she did so she saw Lord Ronald's eyes fixed upon her, and Miss Montrose regarding her with a contemptuous smile. Sir James at the same time leant forward with an air of devotion, and murmured: "Thanks, that is awfully good of you."

A blush of unreasoning vividness covered her white neck and crept up into her cheeks. She longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say; and Sir James, after one rapid glance into her face, was staring with an utter vacuity of expression at the vase in front of him.

"Miss Montrose, I want you to help me," said Cathbert Egerton from across the table. "Lady Montrose has been asserting that in London, during the months of November and December, it is quite an unusual circumstance for us to be able to see across the street. Now, isn't this a most unkind exaggeration?"

"Most unkind! I can only recollect two days this winter when it would have been impossible for the most prying curiosity to find out anything about our opposite neighbours."

"Ah, but then, perhaps your neighbours were of that uninteresting type that you never noticed whether you could see them or not," said Lady Montrose, languidly. "We cannot judge by that. The fog was there in November, for I suffered a martyrdom from them."

"Were your neighbours interesting, Miss Montrose?" asked Sir James, as he helped himself to some grapes. "I know in London they can most conveniently ignored, but in Yorkshire there is no escape from them. There they are, and they must be noticed. We either hate or love them—there is nothing between."

"Not even indifference?"

"No, we don't have it down here. It does for society, but not for an honest Dalesman. So you see what will be expected of you, Miss Montrose!"

She laughed a low, sweet laugh, and looked up into his face in a manner that he thought altogether charming; and he looked after her regretfully as she followed Lady Montrose out of the room.

In the drawing-room, Lady Montrose asked a few questions about her sister-in-law and nephew, and having done her duty left Rhona to entertain herself. Miss Montrose took not the slightest notice of her beyond a stare which took her from head to foot; after which she subsided into a confidential chat with a Miss Joanna Archer, whom seemed to be her special friend.

There were other ladies present, but as they made no advances Rhona sat down on an ottoman and let her thoughts stray to the far-off past.

If she were still Miss Montrose of Beacon Tor, she knew that the reception would have been very different; but poverty is like the leprosy, a thing to be shunned if possible.

The door opened, and in streamed the gentlemen one after the other. Instantly a fresh vitality seemed to assert itself amongst the ladies; eyes that had been heavy sparkled, and lips that had been very still wreathed themselves in smiles. Rhona neither smiled nor sparkled till Lord Ronald dropped down on the ottoman by her side, and looking significantly at the gardenia in her dress, said: "So little Jemmy sent me out!"

"No; I was so dowdy without a flower that he gave me his so that I might not be cut out."

"Mine was destined for you from the first."

"Yours, Lord Ronald!" opening her eyes in grave surprise.

"Yes, mine. Why not mine as well as his?"

looking down into her face in a way that Miss Montrose, watching from the other side of the room, thought intolerable.

"Because you did not know whether I had one or not."

"Indeed I did. Has no one eyes but he?"

"You left the room before I did; and this afternoon your eyes were of no use to you in the dark."

"But there were lamps to the carriage," he said, eagerly.

"And I knew exactly what you

would be like. To prove it," lowering his voice, "I should have asked you to dance the first waltz with me to-night if we had been alone in the carriage."

"That proves nothing, except that you are fond of novelty," with a smile.

"Some novelty, yes; but," with a significant glance, "there are novelties and novelties."

"An old friend is better than a novel one," looking down at her fan, because there was something in his eyes that made her blush like a child of sixteen.

"Let me be an old friend as fast as I can; there are only ten days to do it in."

"But what will it matter when we say goodbye?"

"Twenty thousand times more than when we say how d'y do."

"Ten days is just enough to begin an acquaintance."

"One hour with me is enough for friendship, and I have known you more than that. At the end you shall either like me infinitely better or infinitely worse. Which shall it be? Look at me once, and see if I look dangerous."

She raised her eyes shyly, and saw a face which had beauty and passion, and a strange, subtle charm which had led many a woman to a broken heart, if nothing worse. Her lashes dropped on her blushing cheeks.

"Which shall it be?" he said softly,—"better or worse?"

"Worse," she said, struggling against the fatal charm.

"But why?" letting his voice fall till it sounded sweet as a carol; "are you afraid of the risk?"

"I have so little to venture—it wouldn't matter."

"You have yourself; and a man must be sorry to a degree if he did not think that was enough. Did you never hear of the beggar-maid who was richer in her charm than the mistress at the farm?"

"I am a beggar," she said, bitterly, determining to start fair and under no false colours.

He raised his eyebrows in surprise, but said, readily, "Then you have your charm."

Miss Montrose sailed up to the ottoman with strong disapprobation in her face. She had sought out the ugliest man in the room and brought him up as a partner for her cousin.

"Mr. Jakes—Miss Rhona Montrose. Mr. Jakes wishes to dance this waltz with you."

"Than I am afraid Mr. Jakes will be disappointed," said Lord Ronald coolly; "Miss Rhona Montrose and I are just about to practise the last new step from London."

"But indeed I don't know it," said Rhona, earnestly.

"No," said Miss Montrose, contemptuously, "you are not likely to."

"Then it shall be my privilege to teach her," said Lord Ronald, rising and offering his arm.

"It would only be waste of time," said the heiress, with a toss of her head.

That is what I am fondest of," with a low bow.

"I should be ashamed to say so."

"I am ashamed of nothing," and with the utmost imperturbability he led Rhona away.

Later in the evening he took the gardenia from his coat and held it out to her, as she stood behind the heavy shadow of the curtain. "Smell it," he said, "I think it is the sweetest thing on earth."

She smelt it, and then, being fond of the flower, kissed it involuntarily.

"Thanks," he said, with a delighted smile, as he pressed his own lips on it. "I was going to give it to you, but now I shall keep it and your kiss as well."

"Take me back to the drawing-room, please," she said, with burning cheeks.

"Not till we have another waltz. I wish this evening would last for ever."

"For ever! no; how tired we should be!"

"Not together—impossible."

"I cannot dance again, I am tired."

"Then we will sit down" and he would have taken her back to the shaded seat in the window.

"Not there," she said, decidedly.

"Are you afraid of breaking your resolution?" with an amused laugh.

"Not in the least, but it is time for you to talk to somebody else."

"Are you going to bed?"

"I—I, I think so."

"Then I must take you to your aunt to say good-night."

Lady Montrose was standing in the middle of the amber drawing-room when Lord Ronald came up to her with Rhona.

"This young lady," he said, with a smile, "is so exhausted that she wishes to beat a retreat."

"After a long journey, I daresay she will be glad to go to bed. Good-night, my dear," with a frigid salute. "I must thank you for the care you have taken of her," to Lord Ronald.

Fitzgerald shrugged his shoulders.

"I never was thanked before for being utterly selfish. Good-night, Miss Montrose. Pleasant dreams. Mine are sure to be sweet," he added, in a low voice, "with a gardenia under my pillow."

"You will wake with headache."

"A headache, perhaps."

"I am not going to say any more about it."

"I am not going to say any more about it."

CHAPTER III.

A HEADACHE. The words were spoken lightly, but the prophecy came true; and Lord Ronald, who had been scolded severely by the little Baronet in the smoking-room, woke the next day with the consciousness that a man was scarcely behaving like a true gentleman when he made love to one girl, if only with his eyes, when his hand was half promised to another. Augusta Montrose had secured a prize worth winning when he was desperately hard up in the middle of the season, but now the pressure on his finances was loosened, or rather as he preferred to put it, his governor had stumped up handsomely, and Rhona's dark eyes were infinitely prettier than the light orbs of the heiress.

For three days he was careful—careful as any millionaire, who is afraid of being caught by a siren—but on the fourth his reckless heart led him astray, and he followed where fancy led him.

Rhona was bewildered by his rapid changes. She knew nothing of the ways of modern society, of the flirtations which young men are in the habit of pursuing so hotly during the course of an evening, and dropping the next morning. She had been irresistibly attracted by the handsome young soldier, but when he deserted her she turned away from him like a snubbed child, and found a pleasant friend in Sir James Plowden.

Lady Montrose had forgiven her for being the prettiest girl in the house, and made up her mind that she would do her unfortunate sister-in-law a good turn by marrying her daughter to the rich Baronet. So she looked on complacently at the long chats, and told her husband in confidence that he believed they would make a match of it.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Everard, much perturbed, "you don't mean it! I really thought I ought to have apologised to the child for having him in the house. You had better not breathe a word of the change of name, or you'll have her flying off at a tangent."

"My dear Everard, I am not an idiot!" said Lady Montrose, loftily.

It was the fourth day of Rhona's stay, and it had been settled the night before that the gentlemen should go out shooting the next morning, and meet the ladies at luncheon at Plowden Court.

The picture-gallery was the best in that wide county of Yorkshire, and Sir James had set his heart on showing it to Rhona. Lady Montrose had graciously acquiesced in his desire and the rest of the guests, who were rather at a loss for something to do, said a day at Plowden Court would be delightful. The sportsmen started early with their guns, dogs, and keepers, but Sir James stayed behind on the plea of having letters to write.

Rhona was very busy writing home when the carriage came round, and she had to scramble

into her hat and jacket as fast as she could. When she came down she found that the carriages were full, and her aunt called out to her.—

"Sir James has asked permission to drive you in the dog-cart, as he wishes to show you the Fell!"

"I hope you don't object," he said, colouring like a boy. "I have no fell designs on you, only I thought it was a pity you should lose the best bit of scenery in the West Riding, and the road is not good enough for the landau."

"Very good of you," said Rhona, with a smile, as she climbed into the dog-cart. "Promise not to break my bones, and I shall enjoy the drive immensely!"

"If I damage you, I'll promise to damage myself still more. Will that content you?"

"Not in the least, for there would be nobody to pick up the pieces!"

"And they might get mixed. What a curious thought! Fancy, if I got your heart instead of mine!"

"What would you do with it?"

"Keep it!" he said, promptly.

"But I should give you back yours directly; and you couldn't have room for two!"

"I should tell you that I had been so long without it that it wouldn't fit."

"How long—months or years?"

"For four days, or three days and a-half. Which is it?" looking round into her face with laughing eyes.

"How can I tell? What a lovely view!"

The road wound round the brink of a precipice, at the foot of which the river Leader was fretting and fuming in its narrow bed, and casting up white sheets of foam in the face of the rocks. The ground on the opposite side shelved precipitately to the edge of the water, as if running down with its burden of pine trees to have an impromptu bathe; but a little further up the dale there was a small level plateau, on which a house was built like a wild bird's nest perched on the rocks with the pine-wood behind it.

A bridge at this point connected the two banks together, and there was a sawing-mill just behind the house, where fallen trunks were reduced to more convenient proportions before being carted away. The house itself had rather the appearance of an American log-hut, and Rhona admired it exceedingly.

"You would not like to be in it when the river is in spate," said Sir James, with a shrug. "Carter, the man who lives there all the year round, said he had often sat up in the winter expecting the whole place would be swept away."

"But how could the water get right up there?"

"Very easily when swollen by a flood, or the sudden melting of the snow on the hills. If a thaw comes on rapidly those white peaks"—pointing to some summits of the mountain range, which stood out boldly against the grey sky—"casts off the snow like a woman throws off a muddy skirt; it rolls down in huge lumps into the rivers; the rivers rise, and everything that comes in their way—trees, cows, or even houses—are swept along with resistless force. I saw a flood once, and I shall never forget it; but I mustn't keep you, or we shall be too late for luncheon."

"How prosaic that sounds, when I was just imagining such terrible scenes."

"Men must eat, though women may dream," paraphrased Sir James, with a smile.

"And it would not do for you to be away from the home of your ancestors when your guests were waiting."

"Not of my ancestors," he said, with sudden gravity. "The Court came into our hands by a stroke of luck, and we had to change our name in order to get it; but mine has been the most uninteresting life possible. The baronetage is only a Brummagem title given by a Liberal Government to a useful man-of-all-work—our name is borrowed from somebody else, and, I daresay, somebody else thinks he ought to have our lands. There, Miss Montrose, I have told you the naked truth, and not borrowed a rag of romance to clothe it in. Don't you think we sound a despicable lot?"

"Not at all," looking up into the plain face,

which could seem so wondrously pleasant. "It is better to rise from nothing than not to rise at all!"

"Do you think so?" musingly. "Now tell me something about your own people."

"We have done just the reverse of you. We were something, and are nothing—we have fallen instead of rising."

"Sometimes it is grander to fall—Egerton would say so. Misfortune, nobly born, is better than success!"

"You talk as if you had known my mother," she said, her eyes suffused with tears; and then she told him of her mother's goodness and patience in their shabby lodgings—of little Jack—"the darlingest boy in the world"—of her father, the kind-hearted squire of their beautiful home on the Beacon Torr, and whenever she stopped, afraid of wearying him, he begged her to go on.

"And how did you lose it?" he asked, with true sympathy in his kindly face.

"Through a man—a fiend," she said, her eyes flashing as she thought of him, "who led poor Papa into some speculation—a mine, I think it was. He told him it was the safest thing going, and then, the very day before it came to grief, he sold out all his shares, so when the crash came he was richer than he had ever been before, and Papa was ruined."

"What was his name?" said Sir James, quickly.

"Carnhay—a little man with red hair, a bald head, a mole at the tip of his nose. He had sly, ferret-like eyes, which seemed always on the watch for other people's pockets. I am sure, if I had been a policeman, I should have taken him up on the chance!"

"You seem to recollect him well," said the Baronet, stooping as if to see if Magpie had got a stone in his shoe.

"Yes. I should know him anywhere, and whenever I meet him," she said, throwing back her head in the glow of her just indignation, "I mean to tell him that he is a coward—and a scoundrel as well!"

"Sir James drew in his breath with a shiver, and for the rest of the drive was unusually silent."

Plowden Court was a curious old house, and smothered in ivy, the growth of centuries, surrounded by a moat, and with an avenue of ancient elms, giving grandeur to the approach. Cuthbert Egerton and Fitzgerald were standing under the old grey portico as the dog-cart drove up, and the latter, throwing away his cigar, stepped forward to hand Rhona out. The pangs of jealousy he had suffered, on hearing that "little Jemmy" had been allowed to drive her *tête-à-tête* made him reckless now. As their hands met he looked into her face with eager eyes.

"Let me drive you home."

"I only do as I am told," she said, demurely, and sprang lightly to the ground. "Have you had any sport?"

"Nothing worth mentioning. I didn't suppose we should. The birds are as wild as March hares, and the rabbits are shy—as some people when they don't want to be spoken to."

To Rhona's relief the rest of the party appeared and declared themselves to be dreadfully hungry, so Sir James led the way to the dining-room, where they sat down and feasted under the sullen eyes of former Plowdens, who frowned at them from their heavily-gilded frames on the walls. Everyone noticed that their cherry little host was not in his usual spirits, and his jokes were as dull as wine when the cork has been left out of the bottle. Nevertheless, there was a good deal of laughter and fun; and Miss Montrose, throwing aside her fashionable languor, flirted desperately with Eric Barrington.

"Rhona, dear, come and sit opposite to me," said Lady Montrose, as she took her place at Sir James's right hand. "I want to hear if you have fallen in love with Rosebell!"

Rhona obediently slipped into a chair on the Baronet's left, wondering why her aunt chose that position for her. It was a promiscuous entertainment without any ceremony, and people generally arranged themselves as they chose;

but Lord Ronald, who sauntered into the room after the others, found himself too late for anything but a chair beside Miss Joanna Archer—a girl whom he especially disliked. He avenged himself by talking almost exclusively to Cuthbert Egerton who, with ready courtesy, did his best to include Miss Archer in the conversation.

"Sir James must show you his picture gallery," said Lady Montrose, from across the table to her niece. "It is really most interesting. There are all sorts of well-known heroes and statesmen, besides those perpetual Plowdens."

"It is a great thing to be perpetual. I envy the Plowdens," said the Baronet, gravely. "But I don't think Miss Montrose would care to look at them. When you have seen one long-nosed specimen you have seen a dozen. They are all alike."

"But Rhona ought to see them," said the aunt, persistently.

"I tell you what is worth all the galleries in the world," he said, with sudden animation: "and that is the view from the north tower. I must ask Sir Everard's advice about the alterations in the stables; but after that perhaps you will let me take you!" looking eagerly at the girl beside him.

"I shall be delighted. I want to see as much of Yorkshire as I can."

"Then wait for me, if you will be so kind, in the oak-cabinet! It is a room," he added with a laugh, "not a cupboard."

"Then I will seat myself in the room," she said, with a bright smile.

CHAPTER IV.

"RHONA, dear, you must wait here," said her aunt, as the others prepared to leave the oak-cabinet, on a journey of exploration.

"But I want to see the ghost-chamber."

"No doubt Sir James will show it you," and Rhona was left alone.

Rather cross at being obliged to wait for him in solitude, she sat down on an old-fashioned sofa, which had a carved back, more ornamental than comfortable. The door opened, and shut.

Without looking up, she said, reproachfully.—

"Well, well, sir, so you've come at last. You might have come before. I've waited with my bonnet on from three to half-past four."

"If I'd only known you'd say so I would have come before, for this morning spent without you has been a horrid bore," and with a low bow Lord Ronald presented himself, laughing at her dismay.

"I thought it was Sir James," she said hurriedly.

"I knew it was you, or I wouldn't have come. Why do you want to run away?" placing himself in front of her, as she rose from the seat.

"Because I don't want to stay," blushing before his eager gaze.

"Rather rude, isn't it?"

"I hope not. Please let me pass."

"Not till you have told me how you like little Jemmy."

"Very much."

"Not better than me," very softly.

No answer, but a vivid blush.

"Say not better than me," stooping down, so that his handsome face was dangerously near her own.

She tried to draw back, but the sofa stopped her retreat. "I like him exceedingly!" looking up at him, with sudden defiance.

"All the better, if you like me the most. Now the truth," possessing himself of her small cold hands. "Say you do, Rhona."

"My name is Montrose!" she said, freezing.

"I beg your pardon; it was your fault, not mine. I want to know so badly. Just say you like me better than anyone in this house. It isn't much, for we are all strangers to you, and I daresay you don't care a straw for the lot."

Her heart beat fast, her colour came and went.

"Lord Ronald, you are very impudent."

"Am I?" he said, contritely, as he dropped her hands and stepped back. "I thought we

were friends, and I forgot myself. Now I don't know where I stand."

"What does it matter?" she said, wonderingly, as she walked towards the door. "I am the most insignificant person on earth. I told you before that I was a beggar, and paupers have no proper place in society."

"My name must be Cophetua," he said, meditatively. "Cophetua instead of Fitzgerald. Come to the picture-gallery," throwing open the door with a profound bow.

With an indefinable feeling that she was treading on dangerous ground, she followed him down a passage, and through a folding door into the gallery. There were a few portraits by celebrated masters; but Fitzgerald, with the irreverence of youth and high spirits, turned most of them into ridicule, laughing at the different varieties of the Plowden race, and suggesting that it was a merciful dispensation of Providence that had brought the ancient race to extinction.

"Now, here's a fellow of a different stamp," stopping before the picture of an elderly gentleman, which was hung at the further end; "the aristocratic element has disappeared, but the intellect has come out strong."

"Mr. Carnhay!" exclaimed Rhona, in surprise, as she recognised the ferret-like eyes, the scanty red locks, and the mole at the tip of the nose, to which she had alluded that morning.

"Yes, that is Jemmy's father," said Fitzgerald, carelessly. "He made the cash, and his son enjoys it."

"His father!" with a shudder of utter loathing.

"Yes, Miss Montrose," said a voice behind her. "I am the son of the coward, and the scoundrel. I suppose you will never speak to me again."

"Oh, forgive me, Sir James; I am so very sorry;" and cut to the heart by the sadness in his eyes, she turned to him with outstretched hands.

Lord Ronald looked from one to the other, then considerably walked away.

"Come back, Ronald," said Sir James, gravely. "You are more fit to be Miss Montrose's friend than I am. I—I am not fit to black her boots."

Something seemed to stop in his throat and nearly choke him, but he turned his back on the small white hands which he would have given anything to touch, and Rhona had not the courage to run after him.

He left the gallery by the nearest door, and, as it slammed behind him, Fitzgerald came back to her with quick steps. "What is the meaning of it all?"

"Only this," exclaimed Rhona, the tears running down her cheeks, "I have behaved like a wretch to him, and wounded the kindest heart in the world."

"Impossible! you wouldn't hurt a fly," looking down at her troubled face, and thinking Jemmy was a lucky beggar to have those tears.

"How was I to know that his name was Carnhay if nobody told me? I would have bitten my tongue out, I would—"

"But what have you done?" getting more and more bewildered.

"I told him that man was a coward and a scoundrel; that he had ruined my father and grown rich on the spoils. I couldn't have done worse, could I?"

"Not much. You've put your foot in it about as deep as you could," leaning up against the window frame.

"And what am I to do now?" looking the picture of despair. "I would do anything on earth to make him forget it."

"Marry him!" with a shrug of his shoulders.

"That would be doing him more harm than good," the corners of her pretty mouth drooping, "and—he wouldn't even wish it."

"He is not blind, nor quite an idiot, and he has money."

"You are not helping me—only insulting me," drying her tears with her pocket handkerchief, and turning away from him in anger.

"Rhona!" he began, passionately; but at that moment the door of the gallery was opened by Eric Barrington, who said, with a significant glance,—

"We have been looking for you everywhere, and the carriages are waiting." Then he stepped away, and Rhona hurried after him, leaving Lord Ronald standing alone opposite the picture of Mr. Carnhay, savagely pulling his moustaches.

There was some delay about starting. The ladies got into the landau, and Rhona took her place in the dog-cart, nervously waiting for the moment when Sir James would appear. The carriage drove off. Sir Everard came and patted Magpie's neck. Captain Melville and Mr. Barrington went after their guns; and presently, when her patience had been tried to its fullest extent, Lord Ronald came out of the house, and to Rhona's immense surprise, seated himself in the dog-cart by her side.

"Hope you don't object, Miss Montrose?" he said, courteously, raising his hat.

She bowed without a word.

"Hulloa!" said Sir Everard. "I don't know if I approve of this change of coachman. Jemmy's a man to be trusted."

"So sorry, but Jemmy begged so hard to carry my gun instead of me that I gave in. I expect Miss Montrose pitched into him on the way here, and he's frightened."

"Well, take care of her, and bring her safe home," turning away, with a smile.

They drove down the drive and along the road in silence, Rhona feeling intensely embarrassed at finding herself alone with Fitzgerald after all that had passed.

He waited till Magpie had got rid of some of his freshness, and then let him drop into a slower pace.

"Miss Montrose, I've behaved like a brute to you!"

No answer, though she certainly had heard him, for even the tip of her ear grew pink.

"Am I never to be forgiven?" in the humblest tone.

"Why did you do it?" she said, quickly. "What right had you to think that I should sell myself for money?"

"Oh my soul, I never did!" hotly. "Only it seemed to me so infernally hard that a man like that should be able to get you when—when I couldn't. There, I've let it out, and now you'll hate me." He touched the horse with his whip as if to relieve his feelings, and Magpie started off in a mad gallop. The cart swayed from one side of the lane to the other, and cursing himself for his folly, Fitzgerald held the reins in a grasp of iron.

"Sit still. Don't be frightened," he said, between his clenched teeth; and Rhona sat as still as if she were made of stone, her cheeks rather white, but her eyes clear and steady. One thought to her mother and little Jack, and one to Heaven, and then she looked up to the face beside her.

It was calm and resolute as a man's should be in danger, and her heart suddenly swelled with a wild longing for life and all its sweetness. She clasped her hands together and uttered a prayer.

"I must upset it, it is our only chance!" he muttered. To stop the horse seemed an utter impossibility, and at the end of the lane he knew there was a sheer descent of fifty feet with the river at the bottom. If they came to it the horse would be carried over by its own impetus, and there was certain death for those behind. His resolution was soon taken. She must not die, whatever happened to himself. "Put your arms round me; hold on as tight as you can! For Heaven's sake be quick!"

She did as she was bid, and even in that moment, when life and death were in the balance, the touch of her hands thrilled him through and through.

A sudden wrench to the left-hand rein, which made the horse veer suddenly to the side, the dog-cart heeled over, and heaven and earth seemed to change places before Rhona dared to open her eyes and find herself lying on a bank of withered heather, with something underneath her which had shielded her from all harm. "Unhurt!" said the something, which proved to be Fitzgerald.

Blushing all over, as she found his face so close to hers that one tip of his moustaches touched her cheek, she placed a yard of heather-covered

ground between them before she answered, "Yes, I am all right!"

"Are you sure?" scrambling to his knees, and looking up at her with eager eyes. "No bones broken, or anything?"

"Nothing," shaking her head.

"Thank Heaven!" he said fervently, with a sigh of boundless relief, and in the ecstasy of his delight he caught her hands in his, and kissed them.

As she drew them away, she noticed a shade come over his face. "You've hurt yourself dreadfully," she said, breathlessly; "I can see it in your face."

"I assure you it is nothing only a sprain," rubbing his arm, as he went to look after the horse which had been standing as quiet as a lamb—awed by his own share in the disaster.

"You took such care that I shouldn't be hurt!" she said, regretfully.

"I wish I could always be a buffer between you and misfortune," he said, hurriedly; "not only in a little mishap like this, but in some howling misery."

"You are very kind," looking wistfully at the distant hills, over which the shadows were creeping; "but we must each bear our own burdens, and I don't suppose mine is heavier than is good for me."

"If we could only share them together," he murmured, as he unloosened a buckle.

"But we can't," she said softly, as she picked a piece of heather.

"Can't we be friends?" raising his head, and coming towards her.

"Oh, yes, friends—most certainly!" not daring to look up.

"Only friends!" coming very close; "but such very dear ones—without a secret between us, or a hope that we will not share—and caring more for each other than all the world beside! Rhona, this is my idea of friendship; shall it be yours and mine?"

"No!" with a breathless sigh; "that isn't friendship!"

"It is what poverty calls friendship, when matrimony is out of reach—and—and it is always sealed like this;" stooping gently so as not to startle her too much, he touched her soft cheek with his eager lips.

She turned away from him faint and trembling, her heart beating so fast as almost to suffocate her.

She was young and very inexperienced—she thought of her mother. What would she say to a friendship like this! Still the tempter's voice was in her ear, and it sounded as sweet as the first song of spring. "Rhona, whether married or unmarried, I must still be your friend—nothing must ever come between us!"

She looked away from him in a fever of uncertainty, and suddenly before her eyes rose the kindly face of the little Baronet, with his honest, straightforward glance.

He had wished to be her friend—he had asked so much after her home, her mother and her brother, interesting himself in everything that concerned her—but he had never talked of a friendship such as this. She pushed back her hair with a bewildered sigh. "Take me home, please!"

"Not till you've promised me," standing over her, with a flush on his handsome face.

"I'm afraid!" her long lashes drooping on her blushing cheeks.

"Afraid of what?" looking at her with all the passion of his nature, kindled into flame by her beauty. Oh! if she had only been possessed of her cousin's money-bags, in spite of every barrier that stood between them, he would have asked her then and there to be his wife! "Afraid of liking me too little—or—"

He did not finish, for suddenly recovering from the spell which he had cast round her, she threw back her head with an indignant gesture. "Or liking you too much—say it out."

"There is not the slightest chance," biting his lip.

"I agree with you. As to our friendship —"

"It will last for ever on my side," he said, earnestly; "and before we part, you shall love me, whether you will or no. And now, I am

sorry to say," rapidly changing his tone, "as the dog-cart is disabled, you will have to ride home on Magpie's back, and I will walk by your side."

"But there is no saddle," she exclaimed, in dismay.

"Never mind. You shall not fall, that I can promise you."

"What will become of the dog-cart?"

"We must leave it there to take its chance."

Slowly they went homewards, with scarcely a word spoken between them. She found it as much as she could do to retain her seat on Magpie's slippery back, whilst he kept his hand on her skirt, as if expecting to have to catch her on the way to the ground.

It was very late when they reached the Hall, and yet as they came in sight of its hospitable doors they caught sight of a figure standing on the steps, which disappeared as they came nearer.

"Who was that?" said Lord Ronald, quickly.

"Sir James."

But when they arrived there were nothing but footmen to greet them, and the Baronet had vanished.

CHAPTER V.

MISS MONTROSE took possession of Lord Ronald that evening, sent her own maid with some tincture for his injured arm, cut up his dinner for him, as if she were already his better half, and sang his favourite songs to him as he lay on the sofa in the boudoir.

When she came back to the drawing-room there were blushes on her cheeks and a bright look in her eyes, such as they rarely wore, and even to Rhona, the poverty-stricken cousin, she endeavoured to be amiable.

Whispers passed from one to the other, and knowing glances, but Rhona saw nothing of the mystery with which the air seemed pregnant, and listened to Cuthbert Egerton with undivided attention.

Sir James Plowden never came near her, but stood on the hearthrug, furtively watching her from a distance.

If she chanced to look up and meet his eye he blushed to the roots of his hair, and looked as if he had been caught picking somebody's pocket.

The next day there was a battue at Plowden Court, and all the gentleman started off after an early breakfast, with the exception of Fitzgerald, who was supposed to be nursing his sprain.

The huge house seemed very dull without them, which, perhaps, accounted for Rhona's dejection.

For what reason she could not tell, but she felt as dull as a child suddenly robbed of its holiday, and a thousand times that Christmas eve wished herself back in Elizabeth-street with her mother and Jack.

These men of the world perplexed her, and she did not know how to take their continual changes.

Lord Ronald might have been a stranger to her in the evening and a lover in the afternoon, and how was she to treat him for the future? He had dared to kiss her cheek, and she had forgotten to rebuke him. He had asked her to be his friend for life, and she had only given him a hesitating answer.

Her cheeks were burning, her brain confused, as she sat in the library trying to write a letter to Jack.

The door opened, and in came Cuthbert Egerton to fetch a book, he said. But when the book was found he fidgeted about, as if he had something on his mind which he wanted to say.

"Have you heard the news?" herald, presently, with his back turned towards her as he investigated a long line of books.

"Lady Montrose has just announced it to us. Fitzgerald has proposed to her daughter, and been accepted."

"To-day—just now!" with a sound like a catch in her breath.

"Last evening, I fancy, from what she said. It has been going on for some time; and we all knew it would come off sooner or later. I have found Montaigne's Essays, and I am going to

carry them off to my own room. There is just half-an-hour before the dressing-ball," and away he went, without casting one look over his shoulder.

"Engaged to Augusta Montrose," the pen fell from the girl's hand, and she sat back in her chair with wide-open eyes staring blankly at the space before her.

"I will make you love me before we part, whether you will or no."

The words were ringing in her ears, and yet a few short hours after they were spoken he had made an offer of marriage to someone else. And this was a man's idea of honour.

She got up from her chair, and paced up and down the room, her small hands clenched; her eyes flashing. It had been going on for a long time, and everyone but herself was in the secret. Oh! how they would laugh if they only knew. He was only playing with her all the time. His passionate looks were so many unwritten falsehoods, his seeming tenderness a fraud.

The tears came into her eyes, and brimmed over, but the flame on her cheeks scorched them dry.

Mr. Egerton, no doubt, in the kindness of his heart, had come in on purpose to tell her, that she might not make herself a spectacle for the world to laugh at. Thank Heaven! she wasn't in love with him. No, even this afternoon she had been able to think of someone else—quite an ordinary acquaintance—whilst he was looking down at her with his glorious eyes, and begging for her friendship.

She could go back to her mother and tell her that she had not left her heart behind—nobody had even wished to steal it.

Sir James came suddenly into the room, and stood exactly opposite to her.

"I am writing letters," she said confusedly.

"Do you generally do it standing up?" he asked, with a slight smile.

"No, but I don't glue myself to my chair, so that it is possible for me to move about." And she resumed her seat with alacrity.

"Miss Montrose, I am afraid you will think me very impertinent—"

"I shall if you pry over my shoulder and read my letter."

"I wasn't thinking of such a thing," drawing back from the table as if it had bitten him; "but, the fact is, that we slaughtered such an amount of game, that we didn't know how to get rid of it."

"So you made up your mind to sell it," Thinking to herself, with some scorn; that he was rich enough to have spared it to the poor.

He drew himself up with some dignity. "Of course, you think a Gurney capable of selling his soul for gold!"

"I think nothing of the kind. What were you going to tell me?"

"That I had ventured to send one or two pheasants to your mother, and now I am sorry I did."

"And I am so glad. Dear Sir James, how very good of you!" her eyes sparkling.

"I thought perhaps you would be insulted." Wondering why her eyes were wet he turned away.

"I am never insulted unless people mean to be impudent," she said, gravely. "What a good thing it is that Lord Ronald is going to marry Miss Montrose."

"Do you think so? I don't."

"Capital! they are so well suited to each other," nervously picking the feathers off her pen.

"Admirably!—one all head and no heart, the other all heart and no head. They will live together for a year, fighting like cat and dog, and then avoid scandal by a judicial separation."

"And that is happiness," dropping her head on her hand, with a sudden sigh.

"The happiness that is bought with money. And there was a world of bitterness in his tones.

"And yet it is disagreeable to be without it."

"Not half so bad as having it and not being able to do what you want with it."

"I don't see what is to prevent you."

"Don't you?" he said, shortly. "Would you touch a penny that belonged to the son of John Gurney?—a coward and a scoundrel!"

"Oh! please don't. I could bite my tongue out for having said it."

"It was a gross exaggeration. My poor father was ill at the time, and the brokers managed the business for him; but you don't expect a money-lender to be a gentleman, and you are quite right to snub his son."

"But I don't snub him. I want to be friends."

He shook his head sadly.

"There is a gulf between us, and my arm is not long enough to reach across it."

Then he quietly turned his back and went out of the room.

Rhona bore herself very bravely between her two lost admirals, although the situation was, to say the least, embarrassing. But Mr. Cuthbert Egerton took her into dinner, and succeeded in interesting her so much with an account of some peculiar character he had met with in his London parish, that she got on much better than she expected.

Lord Ronald sat by his *façade*, looking rather like a wild bird of the woods lately domesticated. His conversational powers had deserted him, as well as his usually healthy complexion, and his eyes kept wandering down the table after forbidden fruit, whilst he pulled his moustaches in moody silence.

Augusta, on the contrary, looked quietly content, like a cat that has successfully stalked a mouse, and Lady Montrose was radiant.

After dinner Rhona suddenly recollects her letter which she had left on the table, and went into the library to fetch it. As she disappeared through one door, the gentlemen came into the hall from another, and Lord Ronald instantly started in pursuit. While she was bending over the writing-case he walked in, and shut the door behind him.

She looked up in surprise. "Have you come for my congratulations?"

"No there is no occasion for them."

"Scarcely polite to my cousin."

"I am only thinking of her."

"Rather a waste of time"—folding up her letter with great deliberation, though her heart beat fast.

"That can't be helped. Am I no longer worth looking at because I am engaged to be married?"—pushing a chair toward her and sinking down wearily into another.

"Oh, dear no!" with a mischievous glance.

"But I thought you might be shy."

"Shy! I was never that in my life."

"Perhaps you were never in love before."

"Ah, perhaps not!" with a sudden smile.

"If you won't sit down I shall have to stand up."

"Pray don't trouble yourself. I am going away."

"Not yet," interposing himself and his chair between her and the door. "Have you forgotten your promise of yesterday afternoon?"

"I never made any!" drawing up her long neck, as he thankfully remembered her refusal.

"But you will. I need it more than ever."

"The kind of friendship you asked for," he said, steadily, "none but your wife can give."

"Like all the rest, you desert a man when he is in trouble;" and he leant his head on his hand, as if sore oppressed.

"In trouble!" she repeated; "if she had refused you, I could understand."

"Could you then listen now. Last night, when we came back together—you and I"—his voice softening as he said the words—"I found a telegram from the governor, that he utterly refused to meet a bill which was falling due to-day, unless I could telegraph back to him that my engagement to an heiress was no hoax. That bill has been backed by a brother officer of mine, and if dishonoured, I was a social ruin. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand,"—the colour rising in her cheeks—"my cousin has been sacrificed to your credit."

"Sacrificed!" in bitter scorn. "Does she look like a slaughtered lamb?"

"No, poor thing, I suppose she thinks you love her."

"She doesn't think about it. She has no more heart than an oyster."

Unhappily this seemed so true that she lacked the courage to contradict it.

"I am the victim," he said, with exceeding bitterness, "though I am bound in honour not to confess it, wedded to a statue, I must turn to somebody else for friendship—is there any harm in that?" rising slowly from his chair.

"I don't know," doubtfully, with a longing glance at the door.

"Then I will tell you," softly. "We shall be cousins, so you ought to—to like me; we ought to be such friends as there never were before. Rhona are you going to be hard-hearted to the most miserable beggar that ever lived?"

She looked up into his face in earnest inquiry. It was glowing with such passionate tenderness that her heart misgave her, her eyes drooped, and she stepped back, but as she did so, he stooped his head suddenly, and pressed his lips to hers.

Quivering with indignation she threw back her head, her eyes flashing fire, but before she could speak, a sound came from the other end of the room, and to her intense dismay she found they were no longer alone.

"Lady Montrose sent me to ask if you had finished your letter," said Sir James, coldly, his eyes fixed on Fitzgerald, although the message was not for him.

Rhona, crimson and tongue-tied, made for the door, which he opened for her with a grave bow, and the two men were left to confront each other.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now, Jemmy, not a word," broke out Lord Ronald, impetuously. "I know that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and so I am; but put yourself in my place for an instant."

"I would rather not," curtly.

"But you must. Rhona is the sweetest creature that ever breathed. The very first night I saw her she knocked me over with those glorious eyes of hers, and up till yesterday evening I was never certain that I couldn't get out of the scrape without hooking myself on to her cousin."

"But you were to-day."

"I know it; but then, don't you see a man can't pull up all in a moment?"

"Then he ought to be muzzled."

"A capital plan, then kisses would be impossible. I tell you, Jemmy, I am spoons on her to any extent you like to fancy; and when I saw her dear little face just a few inches from mine I couldn't have helped touching it if it had cost me my life."

"And what will it have cost her?" burst out Sir James, fiercely. "You are so disgustingly selfish; you don't think of that!"

"I've done her no harm."

"No harm? when you've done your best to spoil her life!" his dark eyes flashing contemptuously.

"It's no worse for her than it is for me. I'd marry her to-morrow if I could."

"And what about Miss Montrose?"

"She would soon console herself if she found somebody higher up in the peacock."

Sir James leant against the mantelpiece, thoughtfully.

"If she were better off you would marry her. Nothing but poverty stands between you," he said, slowly.

"Nothing, my dear fellow! I'd jump at the chance."

"And you think she likes you?" in a muffled voice.

"I fancy so," with a smile, "she looks so deliciously shy when—when I'm lighting up."

There was a sudden clatter amongst the fire-irons, as if Sir James had kicked them. His face was very pale when he raised his head, but his eyes blazed. "You make love to one girl in the library, to another in the drawing-room—and you call yourself a gentleman!"

"I don't call myself so," quietly, "because everyone takes it for granted. Come Jemmy," he said, after a pause, "don't be nasty, or I shall believe you are hit yourself!"

"Believe what you like. A Carnhay would be

an utter idiot if he let himself fall in love with a Montrose!"

"But men are idiots sometimes; and you would make her a better husband than I should."

Sir James frowned.

"I'm not in the mood for joking; but look here, Fitzgerald, if you marry her you'll be true to her? You won't be running after other women and breaking her heart!"

"There wouldn't be another woman in the world to me if I once had her. But where's the good of talking about it?" with a heavy sigh; "she isn't my wife, and she never will be."

"Only, for Heaven's sake, be kind to her!" said the Baronet, hoarsely, as he turned to leave the room.

"You are a good little fellow, Jemmy!" and Lord Ronald laid his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder. "Why the deuce you don't hate me I can't conceive."

"Perhaps I do," and he smiled grimly, as he shook himself free from Fitzgerald's grasp.

Lord Ronald sauntered into the drawing-room, his blue eyes roaming eagerly in search of Rhona, as he sat down beside her cousin.

"I thought you were lost," said Augusta, with a smile, as she moved her dress to make room for him.

"So I was, in a confab with Jemmy."

"Jemmy, as you call him, was here only a few minutes ago. Mamma sent him after Rhona, knowing that he would be willing to go."

"He's always willing to be useful," taking up her fan.

"Especially in this case."

"If he came to fetch her, he did not bring her back," raising his eyebrows, with secret annoyance.

"No, because you were so cruel as to keep him. She has been watching the door ever since."

"Other people are out of the room besides Plowden!"

"Yes, but no one in whom she is interested, How unkind it was of you to drive her home yesterday."

"Unkind to spill her, if you like."

"Now, if Sir James had done it, and caught her in his arms, it would have been quite romantic!" with a foolish little laugh.

"I don't see why he should be more romantic than I," mentally contrasting his own proportions with those of his small friend.

"Only he could have improved the occasion," her light eyes shining maliciously.

"And so could I!" Why not, in Heaven's name? I think I'm as good a hand at it as he is."

"Perhaps so," very coldly; "only, you see, he is free and you are not."

He bit his lip until the blood came.

"Go across the room and ask her to sing."

"She looks very comfortable, a pity to disturb her."

"Nonsense, Mr. Egerton and she can have nothing in common."

He rose unwillingly, and not at all certain of the reception he would meet with.

"Miss Montrose," he said, with his most deferential bow, "may I have the pleasure of taking you to the piano? We are dying to hear you sing."

The colour rushed into her cheeks, but she would not look at him. "I am hoarse to-night," she said, quietly.

"We can scarcely believe it."

"It is a woman who says so, so it may be true," still with her eyes fixed on her fan.

"Women are more reliable than men."

"Infinitely."

"That with Cuthbert Egerton beside you?" "That with you in front."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow, we might have the song."

"You may from some one else. Ask Augusta," and she turned away as if to dismiss him.

He gave her a look, meant as an appeal for forgiveness, but it was lost on her back hair, and then he went back to the sofa.

"You failed?" laughed Augusta. "I thought you would."

"Then why did you make a fool of me?" he said, angrily.

"Poor little thing, after your flirtation the other night she expected another *dénouement*. But here comes Sir James, and now she will be happy. She really wouldn't be bad looking if she had more style."

"When she had gained the conventional graces and lost her own, of course it will be a great advantage," he said, sarcastically, as his eyes dwelt with dangerous tenderness on the deer-like head, poised with such exceeding grace on the long, proud neck; the slight figure so exquisitely rounded, with the charms of budding womanhood added to the freshness of the girl; the pale sweet face, which sorrow had stamped with that wistful look which goes straight to the heart of man.

"Has she any of her own to lose?" asked Augusta, carelessly.

"Poor child, her face is her only fortune, so that it will be a mercy if Sir James takes pity on her. What has happened to him to-night? He has got my photograph-book turned upside down, and he looks as if he had seen a ghost."

"Very far gone, I should think. Perhaps it's Miss Archer."

Very far gone they might have thought, if they had known what he was doing only a few minutes before—sitting in a small room, which was neither library nor store-cupboard, but a mixture of both, and fireless, because rarely used—his arms folded on the table, his head bent down on his arms, alone in the cold and the dark, trying to make up his mind to do the noblest thing that man ever did, and resign the sweetest dream that had ever come into the heart of man to conceive.

CHAPTER VI.

Rhona Montrose had stolen the heart from his breast, and he dared not ask for hers in return: "because the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children," and the wrong which he had not done stood like the figure of Medusa between them.

"Peace on earth, goodwill to men;" but how could there be peace when his heart was torn by a thousand fears? How could there be goodwill to men, when man seemed bent on driving him to madness? He thought of Ronald Fitzgerald with his handsome face, his winning ways.

No wonder that a girl like Rhona, unaccustomed to the flatteries of the world, should let her heart go out to him at the first word of tenderness, and imagine herself beloved because eyes said more than lips dared to utter. No wonder—but oh! the pity of it! Why were women blind to everything but outward attractions? Why could they not look below the surface, and see the generous devotion which was waiting to make the happiness of another's life!

Short and plain, he exaggerated his own deficiencies in his simple humility till he forgot that his plainness was redeemed by large, dark eyes, shaded with long lashes and a particularly pleasant expression of face, and his want of height by a breadth of shoulder, which saved him from insignificance.

No girl could look upon him and entertain the thought of love; and Rhona Montrose, who had meant to be his friend, had cast him off because of his parentage.

It was detectably unfortunate that this one girl should hate him because he was the son of Robert Carnhay, because she was the only one whose friendship seemed worth all the rest of the world beside. He had no anger against her, only an enduring pity to think she had wasted the first love of her youth on an inconstant butterfly like Fitzgerald.

Still she must be happy, if every other woman on earth were made to cry in order that she might laugh. And if it were in his power to make her so, no effort on his part should be wanting.

Having gained composure through the exercise of a wondrous magnanimity, he went back to the drawing-room, to look at a photograph-book upside down, and to drink tea out of an empty cup!

He saw how Rhona tried to keep Lord Ronald at a distance, and he put himself in her place

with his accustomed unselfishness, and suffered acutely; but he never said a word to her during the whole course of the evening, or tried in any way to win her favour for himself. A Carnhay could never be anything to a Montrose but an object of scorn and loathing, and he thought he saw her shudder as he touched her hand in saying good-night. Be it so, he would serve her either with or against her will, and die content if he had succeeded in making her happy.

"Good-night!" said Lord Ronald, in a low voice, pressing her hand. "Remember Christmas is the season for goodwill to men!"

"Yes, but not to women," drawing away her fingers resolutely; "so you may hate me as much as you like!"

"Rhona, my dear child," said Augusta, suavely, as she stopped to say good-night at the door of her bedroom, "I have a little hint to give you. Treat Lord Ronald a little more civilly to-morrow. If you show your disappointment so markedly people will only laugh at you, and he will guess the reason why."

With flaming cheeks Rhona bounded into her room, afraid of electrifying the whole corridor if she gave vent to the speech which rose to her tongue.

"My disappointment, indeed!" she cried to the wall and the furniture. "Who dares to say I wanted him, when Sir James is worth a dozen of him—a dozen, at the least!"

(To be continued.)

CHRISTMAS LEGENDS.

—:o:—

It is hardly possible to realise in this prosaic age what Christmas was in the olden times. Now two or three days at the utmost suffice to pay our respects and complete our rejoicings for the 1st of January; but amongst our forefathers, and, indeed, in most Christian countries, it was looked upon as the festival of the year, and England has always been celebrated for its observance, and perhaps next has come Germany. Of various legends and traditions with which the festival is surrounded, some of which have lived down to the present day, is the date of the celebration, the 25th December. The exact date of the birth of our Lord has long been a matter of keen dispute among the learned; and it has been generally agreed that it could not have been on the date at present given to it, for several reasons—one of the most important being that the shepherds could not have been watching their flocks in the fields at night, at such a time, for in the Holy Land it is the very heart of the rainy season.

Sir Isaac Newton, about whose orthodoxy there could be no question whatever, has attempted to account for the choice, by arguing that it is merely symbolical—one of the cardinal points of the year, the winter Solstice being chosen for this, as other points were for other festivals. Whatever be the truth of the matter, it is unquestionable that the day was fixed in the very earliest ages of the Church, and has been consistently adhered to ever since.

The Saxons have given us most of our traditional amusements and legends, and, as might be expected from their character—that of a self-indulgent, hearty-eating race—they mostly refer to good cheer. One of the prettiest, and perhaps best known, of the legends is that which refers to the Wassail Bowl, which still lives in the "loving cup" now handed round at Christmas time.

The Saxons before drinking were in the habit of saying "We Hael" (be in good health), and the special occasion on which it was used, so as to become a Christmas custom, is said to have been when Hengist and Horsa invaded Kent. After the Saxons had conquered and were firmly established, the legend runs that Hengist gave a grand entertainment at his castle, to which the British King Vortigern was invited. The fair Rowena, the daughter of Hengist, in accordance with the Saxon custom, took a cup

of wine to the King, and kneeling gracefully before him offered it to him, with the words, "Liever kyning, wes hael" (Dear king, your health). Her grace and beauty so won upon the susceptible heart of the monarch that he fell in love with her there and then, married her afterwards, and we presume they lived happy ever after, as there is no chronicle to the contrary.

After miracle plays had ceased, and when still stage plays, if not in their infancy, were in their early childhood, there was a species of entertainment much in vogue at Court and at great noblemen's houses called "Masks," of which we have many good examples, notably those by Ben Jonson. Among these is one on Christmas, which was presented at Court in 1616. In the list of characters is given a very good description of the various Christmas traditional customs personified. It is worth reproducing. Father Christmas, or, as he calls himself, "Gregory Christmas," is attended by his ten sons and daughters led in a string by Cupid in a flat cap and a 'prentice's coat, with wings at his shoulders. Then follow:—

MISRULE, in a velvet cap, with a sprig, a short cloak, and great yellow ruff, like a reveller; his torchbearer bearing a rope, a cheese, and a basket.

CAROL, a long tawny coat, with a red cap, and a flute at his girdle; his torchbearer carrying a song-book open.

MINCED PIE, like a fine cook's wife dressed near; her man carrying a pie dish and spoons.

GAMBOL, like a tumbler, with hoop and bells; his torchbearer armed with a colt-staff and a blinding cloth.

POST AND PAIR, with a pair royal of aces in his hat, his garment all done over with pairs and fours; his squire carrying a box, cards, and counters.

NEW YEAR'S GIFT, in a blue coat, serving-man like, with an orange and a sprig of rosemary gilt on his head, his hat full of brooches, with a collar of gingerbread; his torchbearer carrying a marchpane (*i.e.*, a confection of pistachio nuts, almonds, sugar, &c.), with a bottle of wine on either arm.

MUMMING, in a masquing pied suit, with a mask; his torchbearer carrying the box and ringing it.

WASSEL, like a neat sempster and songster; her page bearing a brown bowl, drest with ribands and rosemary, before her.

There are one or two others, but they are of no importance.

We have only space to mention what may be called the children's legend, that of "Santa Claus," which is the nickname of St. Nicholas, who was not only the patron of children's Christmas presents, but also of clerks, and, Heaven forbid I also of thieves. Let us hope it cannot be the same St. Nicholas. The legend goes to say that if the children put their stockings up the chimney on Christmas Eve they will find them on Christmas morning filled with toys by the good saint. This pretty fable is implicitly believed by the little ones of Germany and the United States, where it finds most favour, and their parents do not disabuse them of it. Let us hope they will all find a goodly supply this present year of grace, and wish them and all our subscribers the old greeting, which is ever new,

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

At the public library at Macon there is a barometer made simply of a thin strip of cedar and a thin strip of white pine, placed together and stuck perpendicularly in a base rest of wood. When it is going to rain the strips bend down, and when it is to be dry they stand rigidly stiff and straight. It is said to indicate coming storms unfailingly.

A VERY welcome Xmas Present or New Year's Gift would be one of Campbell's Melodeons. Thousands of these beautiful instruments have been sold, and many a dull moment can be pleasantly passed if there is one in the home to fall back upon.

A PLAIN GIRL.

—:o:—

CHAPTER VII.

Our arrival at ten o'clock at night, tired and hungry, was considered nothing more or less than a capital joke on the part of Misses Maxwell and Aunt Flo.

There was no sympathy for me, not even from Doosie—noting but roars of laughter as I related my recent experiences; and to my query as to whether they were not frightened at my long absence Bobbie replied that they knew Captain Karalake would find me, and that nought was ever in danger, and that she herself had once been missing likewise for hours, and it was the best joke she ever knew in all her life.

My white steed, as it stood at the foot of the steps, afforded still greater amusement ere it was led away to taste os's for once in its life, and I must say that I felt rather hurt and disappointed at my reception, as I made my way upstairs to bed, accompanied by Doosie, who kept up an unceasing stream of questions as I undressed.

"Fancy you and Captain Karalake, of all people, rambling about over the moors hand in hand. Oh, oh! it's quite too funny!" holding her sides as she spoke. "I wonder how many nasty speeches you made to one another, eh?"

"Not one!" I rejoined, emphatically; "at least, only one, and that he did not mean, I'm sure."

"Let us have that one—at once."

"Oh, he did not intend it, I know; but he said he hardly knew the difference between my cries for help and the hooting of an owl!"

"That was one for your nob. Not mean it! Of course he did, and of course you flew at him in turn!"

"No, and never will again. We are capital friends now."

"Oh, indeed! a likely tale! You were civil because you were in a fright, but you will be as bad as ever to-morrow; of that I am perfectly certain."

But Doosie was quite wrong for once. On the morrow I did not appear early, and I felt a strange reluctance to meeting my late companion—why I could not exactly say. I meant to turn over a new leaf with regard to him, though it was rather late in the day to mend my manners now.

I did not meet him at lunch, and all the afternoon I was tremulously taken up with ecstatic preparations for my first ball. I had no warrant to "come out," but I was going to do so all the same.

"Grandmamma would never count a small ball in Scotland!" quoth Doosie.

I would not meet my partners again, and Doosie's kind parent had presented us each with the most exquisite, dresses exactly alike. There they lay side by side on my bed like twin sisters, white net over white silk, and trimmed with silver. I could not take my eyes off them.

The gardener had made us each big white bouquets to correspond, and when we were ready and made our smiling début in the hall among the other veteran ball-goers Colin and Captain Orr declared we looked like two young brides.

In spite of our toilettes and our youth we did not (yes, the humbling truth must be confessed) get many partners. We danced with Captain Orr, and one or two of the usual *habitués* gave us each a dance—country dance; but five ladies of a family were rather too much of a good thing to go through, and there was a preponderance of girls over men, and pretty girls too, so that for a good part of the evening at this our first ball, Doosie and I had plenty of time to look about us, and pretended that we rather preferred it than otherwise, but each knew that on the part of the other this pretence was a mere hollow sham.

I watched with interest the different flirtations. Aunt Flo—in a red tulle garment with a very low body—standing in the middle of a group of men waving her programme by its cord, exchanging chaff and laughing her peacock's laugh,

high above the band. Young men, I have since been told, considered "Old Flo" capital sport. She swallowed every compliment, she danced divinely, she called most of them by their Christian names, and did not expect to be introduced to their sisters, and she gave capital dinners; and with an expectation of favours in that line to come, these greedy young men always "shoved" their names down on her programme.

Bobbie and Jessie were waltzing away, and enjoying themselves to the top of their bent.

Captain Orr was deporting himself to a hideous girl, the sole heiress of a soap boiler, and Captain Karalake had only eyes and ears for Lily Norton. Certainly she looked very well; her pale blue dress set off her lovely complexion and golden hair to the greatest advantage, and she had a shy way of holding her head one side and casting down her eyes, for which I would have been happy to have gone over and slapped her, but that Captain Karalake no doubt considered extremely taking.

She seemed pleased with his attentions, for she danced with him I counted four times, and they were away for fully half-an-hour in the conservatory. Had he proposed!—if not, he certainly intended to. Anyone with half an eye could see that he was hopelessly smitten.

Would she say "Yes"? I should think so! He was far the best-looking man in the ball-room. He was of proud family—rich, and more than all, had won some laurels in active service. Of course she would say "Yes." I should be furious with her if she did not; for I liked him now so well that I wished him to succeed in everything he undertook; and yet such is the kaleidoscopic condition of the female mind that in my innocent heart I hated her, and was bitterly jealous of his preference for Lily Norton.

I devoted my time during a set of Lancers to watching them closely. We were *vis-à-vis*; and instead of attending to my partner my whole attention was centred upon the couple opposite. He was nervous—doubtful of his own worth—embarrassed and torn between hopes and fears; so different to Captain Orr and his heiress.

Captain Orr was quite cavalier in his attentions and treated the heiress, who looked upon him with mingled awe and admiration, quite *de haute en bas*.

As for Lily, she gave various winning smiles and side glances, and looked down like the maiden in "Beware."

The more I looked at her the more I disliked her. I knew that she was pretty. I was bound to admit that; but I was equally convinced that she was as false as she was fair.

Meantime, my answers and the muddle I made of the figures in the Lancers must have convinced my unlucky partner that I was a half-witted young person whose friends ought to look after her. This, till the grand chain, and in going round I of course met my *vis-à-vis*, and he said, hurriedly *en passant*,

"May I have a dance?"

Of course he might. I nodded acquiescence. In the second round he added,—"the next?"

Again I nodded. I should be only too proud, but did not say so; and in five minutes' time we were floating away in, I flattered myself, perfect step—for dancing was well taught at Madame D'Arverne's—to the tune of "The Officers' Waltz."

I was very fond of dancing, and this was, indeed, a treat. I did not want to talk—only to dance; and I quite grudged the two or three minutes' pause for breath.

"How are you enjoying your first ball?" he said, as he led me to the tea-room.

"Not as much as I expected," I returned, frankly.

"I hope you have plenty of good partners?"

"No; very few, and very bad. If you had not been so taken up with Miss Norton you would have seen that I have been a wall-flower half the time."

"Taken up by Miss Norton!" colouring gently, "what do you mean?"

"Oh, who runs may read," with a toss of my head. "I am sorry for you; for though she is very pretty, she is not at all a nice girl," glancing

over at her fair head, which was in our neighbourhood.

"I should not think that you had much idea of what a nice girl is," he answered rudely.

"Meaning that I am not one myself!"

"Come, come; don't let us squabble here. Let me put your cup down; and a truce to personalities."

As he turned away, Lily passed him on the arm of her present cavalier. As she did so she put up her fan and whispered behind it, with a most killing smile,—

"A duty dance with that odious creature? How unselfish of you!"

My face became as fire. I was filled with a furious desire for instant revenge, and, thrusting my arm inside his in hot haste, hurried after my foe, closely watching my opportunity; and I got it.

In the corridor there was a block; her dress, which just touched the floor, was right in front of me. I put out my satin slipper with firm resolve, and rested it on the frail fabric.

Then she walked on. I stood still, and oh, joy! oh, revenge! yards and yards of the tulle came winding and rippling behind her.

She turned and saw me, and no one could wonder that she was excessively angry; but catching sight of my partner, who said to me in a furious whisper, "You did it on purpose;" she merely restrained her wrath, and, smiling a sweet smile up into his eyes, said,—

"What could you expect?"

I stood by, red and sullen, but feeling a wicked pleasure in the conviction that for at least half an hour Miss Lily would be *hors de combat* whilst she was being sewn up in the ladies' room.

Captain Karalake's anger and disgust were too deep for words; he marched me straight back to my bench, and quitted me with a formal inclination of his head.

He had done with me, I could see that, and I was sorry now, of course, when it was too late, that I had allowed my tongue and then my temper to get the better of me.

On the whole, as I removed my filmy dress (very little the worse for the wear), I could not help feeling that my first ball had begun a decided failure.

The next day we (the Glenmore establishment) were having an entertainment in honour of New Year's Eve; it was not to be grand, but just sociable. All the near neighbours and the minister upstairs, and lots of whiskey and reels dancing in the kitchen.

We acted charades. At these Aunt Flo and Captain Karalake were quite the stars; their readiness, their excellent make-ups, their capital acting won uproarious applause. I had in my small way acquired a certain fame in the same line at school, which Doosie did not fail to trumpet forth, and I was pressed into the service as "second leading lady."

The last charade of all was the word "Matrimony." The three first syllables went off with great success, and now came the word—the whole word. It was to be a wedding, of course.

Aunt Flo refused to be the bride. She was wise, for she was years older than Captain Karalake. He and I were to represent the happy pair.

The scene was to be that of a regular Scotch wedding, and we were drawn up at a table with all our witnesses, as the curtains between the two rooms, that did amply for a drop scene, were hauled back.

It was not dumb show, nor dumb scramble—we spoke; and Captain Karalake, who was a born actor, forgetting all our little feuds in the spirit of the moment, audibly took me for his life's partner without the smallest hesitation; but he forgot when he uttered these rash words that we were in Scotland over the border, and so did I—that we were in a country of queer marriage laws, and that the mere fact, play or earnest, of announcing before witnesses that a single young woman is your wife is as firm a marriage-knot as if the ceremony had been performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and half-a-dozen assistant clergy to boot.

I noticed some hurried whispering among the audience—some leaning forward, some shaking

heads, especially among the mob of servants and outer retainers who hung round the hall and occupied rows of forms; but I was a good deal surprised that the curtain fell on this last and best scene with so very little applause, and there was no encore.

After we had tidied ourselves I resumed my usual style of dress, and left the servants to clear away. We all six ladies went back to the general company.

I noticed that some of the women servants eyed me with unusual interest, and said to myself that there must be something about me I had forgotten to take off.

I also noticed that the minister and Mr. Maxwell were talking together very gravely in a distant corner, and that Bobbie and Jessie and one or two of their admirers were in convulsions of laughter at some capital joke—but that was a common thing.

As I looked round for a seat Doosie came up to me with rather a frightened face, and taking me by the arm said,—

"Do you hear what they are all saying, Nellie?"

"No; how should I?" I asked, impatiently.

"Why, they say that that marriage just now

will stand in reality—that, joke or not, it is in

accordance with the laws of Scotland, and that

you and Captain Karalake are man and wife!"

CHAPTER VIII.

My feelings on hearing Rosie's astounding news panted into my ear, were those of alarm and dismay. I merely believed that this was something quite extra in the way of a practical joke that my Scotch school-fellow was endeavouring to play off on my unsophisticated southern self.

I had heard and read of "Gretna Green," of its celebrated blacksmith, and the many runaway couples he had wed, but this was not a case in point.

Captain Karalake and I were quite the reverse of lovers; in fact, I knew that he was in love with another girl, and so far I was in love with no one, and we had only been acting—we were not in earnest.

So the only reply I made to Rosie was bursting but laughing in her face. She stared hard at me with her quick, little keen light eyes, and then said, in an impressive, angry whisper,—

"Come away with me, Nellie, into the little ante-room, and I'll tell you something that will just make you laugh the other side of your mouth. Father and Mr. MacGinty, the minister, are in an awful state about it, and here are you just taking it as a rare joke. It's no joke at all."

This solemn announcement rather awed me, and I stole out after her, feeling rather sobered, but still fully convinced that it was all a trick, and that she was playing her part, i.e., to give me a good fright uncommonly, nay, unusually well. All the same, I was not so easily alarmed—people could not be married off like that I told myself reassuringly; it was utter nonsense.

"See here," she said, closing the door behind me, as I followed her into the little back room, "you may laugh and Captain Karalake may laugh; but you are both married tight according to the laws of this country—so Jeanie, the upper housemaid, says; so the minister says; and father is in a fearful state. He would not have had such a thing happen in his house for anything, and what will your grandmamma say? Of course, it was all a mistake, and you and Captain Karalake hate each other like poison, and he says it's rubbish; but that makes no difference—he saying that can't unmarry you, after his declaring before a roomful of people that you were his lawful wedded wife. The question is, 'What can be done?' " she added, sitting down as she spoke.

"Done!" I echoed, "nothing. We will take no notice—we are English. Your laws, and such ridiculous laws, are not binding on us. He will marry Lily Norton, and perhaps I may marry some day, too—who knows?"

"But you can't," she reiterated, peevishly. "I wish you would take it more seriously. You see

you are my friend ; I brought you up here. I feel responsible for you. I never, never dreamt of such a scrape as this, or of Captain Karslake acting such a thing as a marriage in downright earnest before anyone could stop him was 'quite too utterly dreadful,' as Lily Norton would say ; and, by the way, what will she say to this ? I'm sure he meant to marry her, and she would have taken him."

"And so she may, for all I care," I returned, scornfully.

"I never heard of such nonsense as you have been talking, Rosie, never."

"Nonsense!" she echoed, "you will soon see that it's no nonsense. You had better come into the library and hear all about it for yourself. Come along ; I know father wants to see you, and you may as well get it over. Perhaps they may have thought of something by this time, though I don't see how they can," in a doleful tone of voice, opening the door to the inner room.

Mr. Maxwell was in the library, sitting in a chair before a big square writing-table, pulling hard at his grey, mutton-chop whiskers, and looking very much put out. The minister, Mr. MacGinty occupied the rug, with his hands clasped behind him, and seemingly had just delivered some kind of an oration.

Captain Karslake sat opposite to his host, leaning one elbow on the table, stroking his moustache very fiercely in his hand. He looked fidgetfully impatient, not to say angry with some person or persons unknown.

Had it been imagination, or reality, that it had seemed to me that he had said as we entered the room, "No, not if there was not another girl on the face of the whole earth." Could he have meant me !

It was more than probable that he did, and that he was thus rudely repudiating the mere idea of his ever seeking my hand in marriage.

I felt as I sat rather in the background, both pleased and frightened. To me, a school girl, this notion of all this uproar, about a play, and about me, and the chance of my being married or not married to that gloomy-looking young man who now sat with both elbows on the table, and his hand in his hand, tickled me immensely. It was the best joke I had ever been brought into contact with in my seventeen years.

On the other hand, my sense of self-respect, my dawning conviction that I was growing up into what is called a "young lady"—into a superior being to a mere smart school-girl—into a being who is admired, deferred to as a lover, perhaps—was sorely outraged by being left in no doubt as to the repugnance with which my fellow actor regarded me as possible partner for life. He did not actually say anything before me ; but his looks, and from remarks gathered from Mr. MacGinty as to what had been said before I entered the room, no reasonable, no flattering doubt was left possible to my humiliated mind.

A great deal was said—not by me. Words ran high. Captain Karslake just stopped on this side of swearing ; but after all it seemed that there was a loophole, and if we took no notice ourselves it would pass, the business become a dead letter and forgotten—so much was allowed for English ignorance. Besides, "few had noticed it or thought of it," added Mr. Maxwell, soothingly. It was really Mr. MacGinty who first drew his attention to it ; "it would be a warning to Captain Karslake," &c., and he and I were dismissed with a caution—not exactly dismissed, for we were left behind in the library, supper being a magnet that hastily drew the others from the room—Mr. Maxwell to take in his chief lady guest, Mr. MacGinty to satisfy his excellent appetite, and Doosie. I can't say why he hurried off after them—perhaps to give us a chance of viewing the recent situation from a mutual point of view.

"Upon my word, Miss Dennis," said my companion, rising, and vigorously wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, "I never got a greater fright in all my life. Did you ?" and he really looked quite pale and shaken.

"Oh ! I knew it was nonsense," I said, be-

coming very red on my part at this more than left-handed compliment.

"Oh ! indeed. Well, I was not so sure of that. These Scotch marriage laws are the queerest things out ! You remember that novel of Wilkie Collins 'The Law and the Lady'—it was a more unpremeditated case than this. I could not get it out of my head when they were holding forth. You have read it, of course ! You know the book I mean !"

"No," I returned, sharply, "I never read novels ; grandmamma does not approve of them."

"Oh ! so that's it. Well you were well out of it this time—a case of where ignorance is bliss. Upon my honour, I'd sooner spend a couple of hours under fire than go through another such awful experience as this last forty minutes !" again wiping the perspiration from his forehead as he spoke.

I felt extremely angry, but what could I say ? I could only colour painfully, and look uncomfortable and greatly affronted.

"Ah ! I see, you think I am not very complimentary," he said. "But there's no use in my saying anything ; I should only be putting my foot in it and making matters worse. I am going away to-morrow, and we may as well say good-bye here. It is not likely that we shall ever meet elsewhere, nor, indeed, do either of us particularly wish to see each other again !" he added, with a smile, as he held out his hand quite frankly.

"No," I returned, stung past endurance, "you are quite right as far as I am concerned. I hope most devotedly that I shall never meet you as long as I live. You are, without exception, the rudest, most—most ungenteel man I ever met in all my life, and I can't bear you—there !" and with a gesture of unutterable contempt in the way of waving off his proffered hand, I dashed out of the room at a most undignified pace, leaving him standing alone in the middle of the apartment.

We did not meet again, for he left quite early next morning.

I had a feeling of vague dissatisfaction mingled with a sense of being, as it were, left victor in the field of battle, as peeping behind the blind in my room I beheld him being bowled away to the station in Mr. Maxwell's red-wheeled dog-cart. He was gone. His reproving eye, his frank, gentlemanly astonishment, his overwhelming courtesy, were all gone too, and now we could be at ease, and shriek and scream, and make the drawing room as much like a bear-garden as we pleased—and no doubt we did.

For three delicious weeks longer I enjoyed my holidays, and played at being grown up. The unfortunate charades were tabooed ; that odious word, "matrimony," the cause of all the mischief, was never mentioned—by Mr. Maxwell's orders it appeared—and I was sincerely sorry when the 28th of January came. My wings were clipped, and I was figuratively once more cast at school.

I found a great deal of difficulty in once more shaking down at Mme. Davenre's. Stray little slips in the way of slang, a certain independence of action, and a lofty contempt for lessons, were all quickly eradicated from my mind by my worthy schoolmistress, and after the first fortnight I had quite settled down into my old track, and could have imagined my late visit a kind of dream, only for my daily walk with Rosie, where we fought our battles o'er again, and spent many, many moments in delicious retrospection.

In June my schooldays came to an end. Grandmamma was resolved to launch me upon the giddy vortex of a London season without any further delay, and, curious as it may appear, my "looks," as Morris called them, were decidedly improving.

I had taken quite an unexpected turn, and for the better.

My complexion was no longer used as a handle against me. My thin cheeks were filling out ; and dressed by a first-rate milliner, my hair duly "done" by deft-fingered Morris, I scarcely knew myself as I capered ecstatically before the

long pier-glass in grandmamma's room (in her absence, be it understood).

"Why, Ellen Dennis," I said, to my reflection, "you are quite pretty. Fine feathers make fine birds. You are as good-looking now as Flora Fraser, who was thought so much of at our last breaking-up party. Who knows but you really may turn out to be a swan after all ?"

Grandmamma did not intend me to spend my time figuring before looking-glasses.

Ne, it soon became evident that I and my pretty new frocks were to be seen, and then began a regular tread-mill daily round of London society, and I hated it as much as grandmamma herself ; for she made no secret to me of the fact that all she wanted to do was to speedily get me off her hands, and for this reason she spared no trouble, no fatigue, no exertion, and no money.

Every afternoon we drove in the Row. I dressed like the latest fashion-plate, seated stiffly beside grandmamma in her Victoria—grandmamma, who was all outward smiles and geniality but would mutter under her parasol,

"Do hold yourself up, Ellen, for gracious sake ! Don't poke your head—don't look so glum. Lean back if you like, and try and look more at ease, and as if you were not a little dressmaker taking a carriage exercise for the first time."

It will be imagined how pleasant these airing were to me—how charmingly easy my manners—how constant my flow of conversation !

I noticed (for I am quick enough in such a way) how people looked at me—looked at me hard—and one would ask another "who is she ?" and seemingly answer would be made, and then the querist would look again at me still more curiously—men and women alike—so it was not from admiration, was it ?

What could be the reason of it ? I could not ask grandmamma. All I would receive in reply would be some little snub.

After our drive we went to afternoon tea in grand house, where everyone seemed to know everyone, and where I was quite an outsider, though soft-voiced, daintily-dressed ladies would try to engage me in conversation ; but somehow I did not so easily expand in this atmosphere as in that of the loud, rollicking, and noisy society I had met in the north.

I'm sure they all put me down as stupid or shy, and grandmamma would scold me soberly all the way home on my wooden, schoolgirl manners.

There were dinners, dances, and occasionally the theatre. I liked the latter best. Grandmamma's box seemed popular. A good many men, old and middle-aged, called in from time to time, and I feeling that they were all grandmamma's contemporaries and not mine ; and I managed to chatter away to them, and actually joked quite gaily with these venerable visitors.

I did not know that they were all eligible, wealthy and single, and it was from among their ranks that grandmamma was looking for a partner for me.

She told herself that I, having no startling good looks and no fortune—in short, nothing but my youth, slim figure and bright eyes—would have no chance at all of finding a suitor among eligible young men. But the others—she knew well their weak side, and that with most men the older they are the younger their wife must be.

One evening, as I sat in the front of the box, gazing rather abstractedly round the theatre, I saw, down in the front stalls below me, Captain Karslake.

He was standing up, coolly surveying the audience, with his back to the stage.

As it was during the interval, I saw him look hard at me, as if he could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses. In the wild, rude tomboy was transformed into a very quiet-looking, fashionably-dressed London girl, and was beached up aloft beside a most impressive-looking chaperone, who was literally blazing with diamonds.

He looked away, and then looked again. I smiled — he bowed. Grandmamma saw the greeting, and asked in an east wind voice, "Who I knew down in the stalls ?" I answered meekly, "Captain Karslake whom I met at the Max-wells."

"Karslake !" said one of my aged cavaliers,

stooping his hoary head well forward, "that dark fellow now sitting down! I know him. He is in the 19th Hussars; son of old Anthony Karslake, and nephew and heir to his uncle, Sir Isaac."

Hearing this succinct history, grandmamma put on her gold glasses, and looked down at him with grave, critical scrutiny.

I believe I knew what idea was working in her mind—would he do for me?

Little did she dream that we had been already married, and only escaped being partners for life by a very narrow squeak indeed.

"I know something more about him," said Mr. Bellamy, an aged dandy, whom I could not abide—he was so soft, so smooth, so leisurely in all his movements—like a cat; like a cat he purred soft-nothings into my ear. Like a cat he had claws, and now and then showed them when in company that was not congenial. His moustache was always waxed to perfection; his handkerchief scented; his clothes chosen with the greatest judgment, never too young and yet his was not the get-up of an elderly man either.

Grandmamma, I could see, looked with a gleam of satisfaction at the advances. Yea, I really began to think that he meant them as such—that rich Mr. Bellamy was making up to me.

"I can tell you more about Karslake," he said, twirling his grey moustache and casting aside look out of the corner of his grey green eye on me. "He is trying to brazen it out, but he is too late; everyone knows that he has just been jilted by some Scotch girl; treated awfully badly; and he was very much in love, too, they say."

"Was it Miss Norton—Lily Norton?" I asked, eagerly.

"Norton, Norton! Yes, I really believe that was the name. They were engaged, and all his people had written, and all that kind of thing. She had received a lot of presents; the day, I believe, had been talked of, when, what do you think? A rich Australian came upon the scene—a regular nugget—and she, thinking a bird in the hand worth two in the bush—for Karslake has not much coin now—calmly said she had suddenly changed her mind, and now she is going to be married, or, probably, is married, to this millionaire; and lover number one is left lamenting. Rather a painful position!"

"He does not look very bad," said Colonel Cameron, the first speaker, resolved to stand up for his cloth. "I daresay he will soon get over it; and there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

To this Mr. Bellamy made no response, beyond a rude purring out of his under lip and a raising of his grey eyebrows and his square shoulders.

"It's wonderful to me how you club-men find out the ins-and-outs of all the gossip," said Colonel Cameron, irritated by the contemptuous asseveration of the other.

"We club-men! Why, you are one yourself! It all comes in, as you know very well, in the day's news. It all goes into the smoking-room, and why not?"

"I am sorry for Captain Karslake," I said, trying to throw oil upon the troubled waters. "I believe he liked her very much. I've seen her; she was very pretty."

"It would have been far better had he gone abroad for a couple of months till the affair was forgotten," said Mr. Bellamy, "instead of standing his ground here. He is a man of strong nerves apparently."

"It's not as if he had done anything wrong," I retorted, rather hotly. "He has done nothing to be ashamed of. Why should he go abroad? If anyone should hide themselves it ought to be Miss Norton."

"Ah, I see Captain Karslake has a champion in you," he said, with a quick look of interrogation that made me feel very angry, "so I will not presume to enter the lists," making me a low bow.

"Nothing of the sort," I cried, stung by his manner. "In fact, if the truth were known, no two people could dislike each other more than we do. All the same, I like to stand up for the absent."

"Hush, hush!" said grandmamma, making a sign with her fan.

"The curtain is up. You two really must not keep on talking; you can finish your little discussion another time. Mr. Bellamy, I invite you home to supper," with a winning smile at my companion that showed all the gold in her side teeth.

"If grandmamma only knew how horrid she looked she would never smile," I said to myself.

CHAPTER IX.

I RECEIVED the following letter from Rosie the next morning, strange to say, giving full particulars about Captain Karslake's engagement:

"MY DEAR NELLIE,—

"I have written you pages of letters in imagination; but the fact is we are so taken up with a houseful of people that I have hitherto had no time to do so in reality, and here goes at last.

"Our news is that auntie is going to be married—fancy that!—before either Lizzie or Joe, and taking the bush out of the gap for them, and to a minister, of all people—an elderly man, with a long beard, who came down to stay with Mr. McGinny.

"He is the most solemn, and silent, and proper of men; but you know the old saying, 'extremes meet.' I can scarcely believe it yet."

"What possesses her!—what attracts him!—unless, between you and me, her money. No more novels for her, no more dances, no more fine gay dresses, no more flirtations—even the wedding is to be quite quiet and private.

"No dance, no fun, and she is to be married in dark brown and a bonnet.

"Now for a wedding that is not coming off. I told you that Captain Karslake had been staying at the Nortons.

"You remember how much taken he was with Lily at Christmas? Well, my dear, they were engaged.

"All his family write charming letters—that is to say, his mother and sisters, who live somewhere in England.

"He was in the seventh heaven, and locked upon Lily as an angel almost too good to live in this wicked world.

"He little knew her. I could tell him fine tales about Miss Lily and a flirtation she carried on with a stationmaster.

"After a while his leave was up, and he went away—in grief, of course; and then, a very rich cousin coming upon the scene, the recollection of her engagement was horrible to Lily. She adores money, and this man had tons—masses of gold.

"She encouraged him, and flirted with him, and dattered him; told him all sorts of stories, and he proposed, and they are to be married in September.

"Fancy the feelings of Captain K.! I hear he is bearing it well, is too proud to show his disappointment, is more angry than anything, and is holding his head just as high as ever; but, of course, everyone is talking of it here, for the engagement was no secret, and they were always driving about together.

"If you see him don't pretend you know anything about it. Now for another topic—dress.

"How do you wear your hair—in a fringe? Or is your stern grandmamma adamant? What are the new hats like? Would they suit my style of beauty? Where are you going for the autumn? Is there any chance of a good wind blowing you up to Scotland? Lizzie and Joe send their love,—Your affectionate friend,

"ROSIE MAXWELL."

So here I had the whole story, and the same night I was going to my first ball—not a mere little carpet dance, with a man to play the piano and another the fiddle, but a magnificent crush in a noble house in Belgrave-square.

Grandmamma was very particular about my dress. It was quite a triumph in its way in white, and with a string of large real pearls

round my throat, and a monster bouquet in my hand (Mr. Bellamy's offering). I cannot tell you what I looked like, as I do not want people to think I was vain.

I was to make my *début* in earnest on this great occasion, and felt half-elated, half-frightened as I nimbly followed grandmamma up the wide staircase, embowered on either side with the lovely hothouse flowers.

A good many people were hanging about the doorways, for we were late; grandmamma was always late, on principle. She liked the *clat* of a solitary entrance.

I was presented to our hostess, partners were presented to me—good dancers, young scions of nobility, Guardsmen, and that type; and as I danced well, and presumably looked well, I had far more applicants for dances than there were dances on my card.

As I paused once to take breath—for I and my partner were dancing for dancing sake—I noticed Captain Karslake; our eyes met. He was standing with his back against the wall looking on and pretending to enjoy himself.

Mr. Bellamy, who never danced, was also a fixture against a door-post, and I noticed that he eyed me with an air of complacent proprietorship that I found galling and irritating to the last degree.

I had accepted his bouquet, under pressure from grandmamma; but it did not, in the least, follow that I meant to accept him.

After this valse supper was announced—at least, every one was streaming towards the supper-room—and we followed the crowd, I panting still a little and my partner wiping his forehead, for we had scarcely missed a bar of the "Dolores" waltz.

The supper was laid out on little tables, and at the next table to ours sat a society matron with her broad satin back turned to us. Opposite to her a good-looking colonel in the Guards was ministering to her wants.

We young people got on very well, and laughed and chatted and joked too, though, no doubt, our conversation was not as witty nor as highly spiced as that of our neighbours. During a lull I could not help overhearing snatches of what they were saying now and then.

"Not so many pretty girls here to night as usual," said the lady, whose face I could not see. "That girl with the pearls and in white that dances so keenly, is the belle, so everyone is saying."

"It could not be me, could it?" I asked myself, my heart beating fast with astonishment and exultation.

I held my head down lest the lady's partner should recognise me. If I really was the girl they spoke of how delightful it would be.

"Yes; what eyes, and what a figure! But of course you know who she is, poor girl!" I drawled the man.

"No," replied the lady, in a tone of curiosities.

Then, leaning across, there was something said in a low voice—something that took a good while to tell. It certainly could not be me. No, that was certain; but my vanity was damped by the discovery.

"I heard of it when I was quite a little thing" said the lady, telling a fearful story about her years. "I remember it made a great stir at the time. I had no idea it was in that family; the old woman had certainly brazened it out marvellously—change of name and all. It is certainly rather audacious of her introducing the girl, is it not? As if any man in his senses would marry her!" with a shrug of her capacious shoulders.

"It's hard lines on her, too. It happened before she was born, I believe, or, anyway, when she was a mere infant in arms; and yet, as you say, very few people would care to have her in their family; one's wife's father is such a close connection, and old Mrs. Dennis—"

I was listening with both my ears now, my head held erect, my breath coming and going like the flames of the candle in the wind. Then it was me of whom they had been speaking—I was



CAPTAIN KARSLAKE LOOKED FRIGHTFULLY IMPATIENT, NOT TO SAY ANGRY, WITH SOME PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN.

the poor girl whom no one would marry. My father I what—what had he done?

I felt quite cold all over as I sat and stared with the stare of a basilisk at the couple at the next table, and then the gentleman who had never once looked our way, and whose whole attention had been captivated by his companion, looked up, looked over and met my gaze point blank.

Had any other proof been necessary that it was of me and mine that they had been disengaging, that proof was to be seen clearly written across his guilty, white, and startled face.

Whilst he was still looking over in horrified confusion, for he saw that I had heard all, my parents rose, and offering me his arm, said,—

"The coalition is beginning, I know you would not like to miss it. Suppose we adjourn?"

But I staggered almost blindly to my feet, and turning on him my (I am certain) ghastly countenance, said in a kind of hoarse whisper, "Take me away—take me to my grandmother—I—I—" No further words could my poor lips frame, and presently I was seated in an arm-chair in the ladies' dressing-room, sipping water slowly; whilst grandmamma, distracted from her supper, had a bottle of smelling salts in her hand like a pistol, and made sudden swift charges with it in the direction of my nose. Then the brougham came up, and I was wrapped in my mantle and hustled away down the flower-bordered staircase. As we passed under the porch I saw Captain Karlake evidently preparing to start also. He looked at me very hard, and there was a strange expression in his eyes. Was it compassion? had he heard it? and he pitied me, too? Was he wiser than I was, and in possession of our family disgrace?

"Now what's the meaning of this fainting fit?" said grandmamma, the moment the door of the brougham was closed. "A love affair, jealousy, the supper or what?"

The dark, or rather dim light, made me bold; and, besides, I felt quite desperate, and did not

care if she flung me out on the asphalt and drove over me.

"I heard people at the next table talking of me," I began, in a hoarse voice.

"Dear me! how interesting!" she sneered.

"And not only of me—of you. They said you were very audacious to introduce me into society. They hinted at some terrible disgrace, and called me a poor girl, and said of course no one would marry me."

For three awful minutes there was an appalling silence. Then she spoke three words—very slowly, as if it were with an effort,—

"Who were they?"

"A lady in old gold satin, not young, and a tall man, a little bald, and—"

"Yes, yes, yes! wicked, malicious abominable people, who deserve to be pilloried for their vile conduct. Yes, I know them—Mrs. Methuen and Colonel Cook. My—"

"But grandmamma," I interrupted, with feverish haste, "what did he do? Oh, tell me! tell me the worst," clenching my hands together as I spoke. "I ought to know—you will allow that anything is better than being left in uncertainty. I might fancy it was worse than it is," lowering my voice.

"You could hardly do that. It has been my living death; it has withered up all my feelings, it has made me another person," she said, fiercely; "but I promise you solemnly that you shall know some day, and that the day you are married—no sooner."

"That will be never, then," I said, passionately. "I must know, I will know, and know soon. I told you they said no one would marry me, so you are only just putting me off. Not that I want to be married," I added, incoherently, "but know this about my father I must. Why should it be kept from me?"

"It won't be for long. They said that I had audacity in introducing you, did they? What will they say when they hear to-morrow that you are going to make the very best match of

the season, in point of money, which is the main thing now. Mrs. Methuen angled hard for him, in her own way, and in vain. What he sees in you I can't tell, I'm sure, but he is quite infatuated—quite—and one of the richest men in London."

She paused breathless.

"But who is it, grandmamma? who is it?" I asked.

"Why, Mr. Bellamy, of course. I've noticed it for some time, but thought it was too good to be true, and to-night he came to me quite seriously and asked for your hand. Knowing all—and of course I was only too happy and thankful—I knew that you had no prior attachment, and I said yes. Audacity, indeed!"—charging back on that unfortunate word—"I wonder what Mrs. Methuen will say when she sees your diamonds, your town house, your entertainments. I daresay she will have the audacity to call, and I need scarcely remark that your servants will say, 'not at home,'" sinking back in the carriage as she concluded.

"But, grandmamma," I stammered. "I don't wish to marry Mr. Bellamy, I don't even like him, I really could not. Please don't be vexed with me, grandmamma; it is impossible, and from what they hinted it would be very wrong of me to marry into any family."

"Nonsense, child, nonsense! you don't understand what you are talking about. You are tired and upset. Here we are; Morris will go to you first, and take you some hot soup. I always have it after late hours, and"—pecking at my cheek by way of a salute—"we will talk over that other matter in the morning."

(To be continued.)

MESSRS. PAIN BROTHERS, of Hastings, are offering really excellent value in their parcel of Christmas Cards and Art Novelties, which is sent, post free, for Fifteen pence.



LEWIS BERTRAM SEIZED THE POKER AND FOUGHT AS FOR DEAR LIFE.

TRAGEDY AT ROSE COTTAGE.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

PENELOPE BARTON was a strong-minded woman, using the term in its best and broadest sense, and she did not suffer any nervous fancies to trouble her when at her bidding Lotty left her to meet the unknown nocturnal intruder alone.

She felt positive that it was no other than Bertram himself (the man she had known in America as Varinski) returned to secure fresh supplies, either of money or money's worth; and so far from being terrified at the possible encounter Mrs. Barton hoped to meet him face to face.

This man, it must be remembered, was already odious to her before ever she listened to Lord Fane's story. He had destroyed her favourite friend, body and soul. He had made a Western city too hot to hold him, and escaped to England in order to save his life.

This alone would have made the authoress his bitter foe, but she had another ground of offence against him. He had usurped her brother's place. Had dared to give orders in the home which had been her own. He had driven out her brother's child and was accused of killing his own young wife.

Penelope Barton was no coward. As the door of the sitting-room opened, and she found herself face to face with her foe, she uttered no cry, gave no sign of fear, but she looked Dr. Bertram full in the face and said, bitterly,—

"You did not expect to find me here, I imagine, Professor Varinski!"

The miserable man staggered and would have fallen, only by a mighty effort of will he steadied himself.

"I did not," he replied, coldly; "may I ask why you are intruding in my house, Mrs. Barton?"

"It was my brother's house," she answered, gravely, "and should have been his child's. I

am here to look for my niece, Dr. Bertram. You see I know your dual identity! In the name of law and justice, I demand to know where is Meta Rivers?"

"In safe keeping!" And a malicious smile parted the doctor's lips. "I'm afraid you must consider yourself my prisoner, Mrs. Barton. I don't want you to tell tales of what you have seen to-night; and—"

"I think you will find yourself the prisoner!" said Penelope. "I know you do not draw the line at murder, Dr. Bertram; but I do not see any weapon in your hand, and so I trust I shall not become your victim!"

As she spoke the deep voice of the alarm bell sounded through the house; its sonorous note struck terror to Lewis Bertram's craven heart. He turned to rush into the corridor, thinking to escape the way he came, but an unexpected difficulty confronted him. He had left the key in the outside of the door; the door itself closed with a spring, and then could only be opened by the key. Not knowing this little peculiarity the doctor had simply trapped himself like a rat in a trap.

He crossed the room to Penelope's side. He drew so close to her that his hot breath seemed to touch her cheek and burn it.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "Curse you! You have undone me. But I'll be even with you. I'll escape yet!"

He went to the window; drew the blind aside and looked out; but he saw at once escape that way was impossible. The window was so far from the ground that to attempt to descend from it would have been certain death.

But meanwhile the alarm bell had done its work. The butler and footman, looking rather bewildered, rushed into the room, followed by a juvenile page and half-a-dozen scared-looking female servants.

Lotty had entered by the other door and stood by her lady's side.

Penelope's voice never faltered as she turned to the butler.

"This is the man required for the murder of Mrs. Ashlyn," she said, gravely. "You must shut him up in one of the rooms here until the morning, when the police can take charge of him. He must not escape."

It was a desperate struggle. Lewis Bertram seized the poker, the nearest available weapon, and fought as for dear life; but, from the first, the forces were unequal. The two men servants would have been sufficient to overpower one man, while the page was a strong youth of sixteen, who did good service by wresting the poker from his sometime master. The whole scene only occupied a few minutes, and then Dr. Bertram was safely lodged in the room which had been his study, the door locked on him, and the footman left on guard outside with a loaded pistol.

"If you are not afraid to be left, ma'am," said John, respectfully, "I think I had better go over to Hillington and warn the police. It's just possible they'd prefer to come up here to-night, late as it is!"

Penelope shivered, with the need for courage gone her power of endurance seemed to have vanished.

"I think you had better go," she said, slowly. "I suppose he can't escape!"

"The lock is a good one, ma'am," said John, respectfully, "and there's a bolt outside which we have drawn as well. William is pretty strong, and with the page to help him, would be more than a match for any ordinary man. I think you need have no fear."

So Penelope saw the butler depart, and tried in vain not to feel nervous. She kept her maid with her and resolutely refused to go to bed. She knew that sleep would have been impossible, and somehow she felt safer ready dressed, and so able to make her escape in a moment at the first alarm of danger.

"Are you frightened, Lotty?" she asked the girl, kindly.

"When I saw his face I shuddered," confessed Lotty; "I could not help it, he looked so black

and terrible ; but I don't mind now he is shut up. You see, Mrs. Barton," she added, with American frankness, "I never was in the house with a murderer before."

A murderer ! The word sent a thrill of horror through Penelope's veins. A murderer—yes ! Lewis Bertram was certainly that. Had he not killed all the sweetness of her friend's life ! Had he not poisoned his wife ? But did his crimes stop there ; or had he yet a third victim—her niece ? The girl who had appealed to her in the hour of need, for whose sake she had conquered her dislike to return to her native land ?

The minutes seemed like hours to Penelope while she waited ; the servants, disdaining to retire again after the visit of the police, gathered in their own rooms downstairs, and probably indulged in an impromptu meal, for presently one of the maids brought a dainty tray of tea and toast to Mrs. Barton.

She drank the tea feverishly, but could not eat ; food would have choked her. She was too anxious. She did not fear that Dr. Bertram would escape, she felt that he had no more power to do her or hers active harm ; but there was one piece of revenge he could work them and she thought him capable of it.

He might refuse to answer any questions respecting Meta ; they could not buy the news of her whereabouts by letting the wretched man go scot-free ; it would have been compounding a felony ; besides, if ever man deserved punishment it was this monster of iniquity ; but it would be quite in keeping with all Penelope knew of him if he held his tongue and kept Meta's hiding-place a close secret.

It was two hours before John returned ; it was not very long considering the distance of the police-station and the darkness of the night, while the butler as a stranger had been unable to take the short cut, but was forced to keep to the high road.

No doubt the news he told was thought all-important by the officials, for Inspector Scott was aroused at once, and he with a couple of subordinates accompanied John back to Bankside.

Mr. Scott had met Mrs. Barton before, and was not in the least surprised to find her in the hall when he arrived.

He knew she was not the sort of woman to give way to hysterics while so much was at stake.

"It's just what I expected, ma'am," he told her, civilly. "I felt sure Dr. Bertram or his wife was bound to come back here sooner or later if we only gave 'em time."

Penelope went a step nearer to the Inspector ; a gracious, queenly woman, she looked made to receive homage and submission.

"I only ask you to remember this," she said simply : "my niece is in Dr. Bertram's power. If he would tell us where to find her I could be grateful."

She turned aside then and let the officer go upstairs alone. She was too womanly, too gentle to wish to triumph over a fallen foe. She had confronted Bertram bravely a few hours before when it seemed necessary, but she did not wish to witness his humiliation.

"Mrs. Barton's the bravest lady I ever saw," said John, as he escorted the officers upstairs. "Very different from her that used to be mistress here."

The footman reported that the captive had not made the least attempt to escape, he had not heard the slightest movement from the other side of the locked door.

"I should say he was asleep," volunteered the page, "I've never even heard him stir."

"A man couldn't sleep with such a thing as this banging over him. I've got the bracelets here," and Scott took out a pair of handcuffs, "and I'll have to get you to order the carriage presently if we're to take him to Hillington before morning. I wouldn't risk letting him walk or he'd escape in one of those dark lanes I'm pretty sure."

"I can rouse one of the men easily," replied the butler, but there's plenty of room here, and I should think you'd better wait for daylight."

The key was turned, the bolt shot back, and Inspector Scott entered closely followed by his underlings, but the experienced officer saw at a

glance that the carriage would not be required that night. The prisoner had escaped answering for his crimes before the bar of earthly justice, though he would assuredly have to be punished for them by a judge in that far off country where he had sought a refuge.

In other words, Lewis Bertram was dead. He sat in his favourite chair at his writing-table, his head had fallen a little forward and rested on one arm ; a sheet of paper lay on the table, half covered with writing, a pen was near as though it had just fallen from those cold, still fingers.

Inspector Scott put one hand to Bertram's heart ; he knew that it was useless, that the man was quite dead, but the action was just a matter of form.

"Poison, of course," he said, half aloud, and then he noticed on the table a bon-bon box, and guessed the truth : Lewis Bertram had provided himself with a supply of those same poisoned sweetmeats which had killed his wife. He had dredged arrest no doubt, and resolved never to be "taken" alive.

"It is all over," said Scott, gravely, "we had better see what he has written ; it may throw some light on the tragedy of his life."

But it did not, the lines so lately penned, the words which must be Lewis Bertram's last message to his fellow-creatures, were as cruel and heartless a production as could have entered a man's brain.

"I murdered Arline Marston and she was my lawful wife. She had only herself to thank. I had told her over and over again she must never come to Hillington as it would ruin me. When I heard that she had arrived in defiance of my wishes I knew I must do one of two things, confess my marriage and leave Bankside for ever, or remove Arline.

"I did not want to leave Bankside and go back to poverty, and so—you can guess the rest. My present wife never had a suspicion of the truth, and yet the murder was more her fault than mine. If she had not shown me I could have her hand and fortune for the asking, I should not have had to get rid of Arline.

"Of one thing I am resolved, I will never be taken alive, and so I shall end matters at once. My elderly wife can take care of herself, and as she dislikes her precious daughter nearly as much as I do, she won't trouble much over her disappearance.

"Lord Fane insulted me once, but I have paid him back with interest. Every difficulty that came in the way of his courtship was my work, and now I put the crowning stroke on it by taking with me into eternity the secret of Meta's whereabouts."

There was no signature. The last words were in a straggling, laboured hand. As he read them Inspector Scott's face grew stern with anger.

Bertram had foiled them doubly. He had escaped from human justice, and he had left Meta's abode an utter mystery to those who loved her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE excitement in Hillington knew no bounds. The sleepy little town seemed as if it could never settle down again after so much excitement—a murder, a suicide, and two mysterious disappearances within six months seemed enough to turn the heads of the staidest inhabitant.

Of course there had to be an inquest on Dr. Bertram ; but his last letter cleared Paul Hardy's name for ever. The tragedy at Rose Cottage was fully explained now, and not even Paul's bitterest enemy could ever again suspect him of having had a hand in it.

Lord Fane was the person people pitied most. His love for Meta Rivers had somehow or other penetrated to all the little world of Hillington, and pity for his lady-love's strange disappearance was very general for the young Viscount.

The Earl of Hillington presented Paul Hardy to the living of Combe Martin with the full consciousness that his choice met with general approval. No one (except Mr. Dynover) had a word to say against it, only one or two suggested the vicarage was far too large for a

bachelor, and hazarded a wonder whether Mr. Hardy would change his condition before he settled there.

What Paul thought on this subject himself is best described by listening to a conversation which took place between him and Phillis Marston on one of the last days he was to spend in Mayland-road.

"And you are really going away on Monday ?" she said, gently. "Well, I do not think anyone can be sorry to leave Mayland-road ; but I shall miss your sister terribly ; she has been so kind to me."

Paul looked at the sweet, sad face very tenderly.

"I hope you will not stay here much longer," he answered, simply, "Phillis, I am not good at speaking of such things ; but have not you guessed my secret ? Dear, I love you with all my heart, and I shall care nothing for my new home unless you consent to share it with me."

And then he told her how from that very first day at St. Jacut she had interested him as no woman had ever done before, and how, through all the sadness of the dreary autumn when they had been neighbours his love had grown."

"I always made up my mind if ever my name were cleared I would tell you this," he said, fondly ; "you see I trusted you would not think then that a suspicion having once blighted my life need part us."

"It is not that." Philis looked at him with tears gathering in her sweet eyes ; "but, Mr. Hardy, I am no fit wife for you. Think of all that has happened the last year. Think of Arline and how her story has been in everyone's mouth."

"There is nothing in her story, dear, that can reflect on you," he answered, "or on herself either, poor child, unless it be the ingratitude she showed you."

"Oh, don't blame her," pleaded Philis, "I cannot bear it."

"I am waiting for my answer," went on Paul. "My dear, don't you think you could be happy as my wife ? Don't you know that I would give all I have, my very life to save you from pain or sorrow ?"

"It is not that ; but—" and then, very simply she told him of her first engagement.

"I am not regretting him," she said, simply. "I know now I never loved him as I could love, and we had grown away from each other so much we should not have been happy."

Paul stroked her fair hair caressingly.

"Dear, I am only mortal," he said, frankly. "I would rather have been your first love ; but as to giving you up because of that early engagement, why my love would not be worth much if I could think of it. No, Philis, my wishes are unchanged. I want you and you only."

"But your family !" objected Philis.

"Molly loves you already, and my parents are very apt to see things with her eyes. I don't trouble about anything, my darling, if only you will be my wife."

And as Philis loved him with all her heart she no longer tried to put happiness from her, and Mayfield-road witnessed a very happy betrothal.

Paul had pleaded for an early marriage ; but Philis wished to wait until six months had passed since her ill-fated sister's death. This would give Paul time to spend Christmas at home, and have Combe Martin Vicarage furnished and prepared for the wife he hoped would come to him in the first week of February.

"And Paul," whispered Philis, before he went away, "perhaps by then Lord Fane will be as happy as we are. I cannot tell you how anxious I am about Miss Rivers ; I can't forget her kindness to my poor little Arline."

Paul shook his head sadly.

"I see no chance of finding that poor girl. We all hoped that when her mother returned to Bankside she would give us some news of Meta, but Mrs. Bertram positively refuses to see any of us ; and in reply to her sister-in-law's questions declares she does not know where her daughter is. Meta was ill and nervous, so her husband placed her in a Sanatorium, where she would be

well looked after." "That is all we can get out of her."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Bertram has actually come back to live in the house where her husband committed suicide?"

"Yes; she appears devoted to his memory, and so utterly disbelieves the story of his crimes."

"But he confessed one—the worst!"

"I know. I believe her version is that we fabricated the confession. She is a strange woman! What puzzles me is that she really can care for anyone. For years we have looked on her as incapable of any affection except for herself."

Sir Claude and Lady Hardy sent a very kindly letter to their son's fiancée, and begged her to spend Christmas with them. Phillis was not sorry to turn her back on Mayfield-road, she could never have left the place while she was uncertain about her sister's fate; but now that she knew no summer sun or winter rain could bring Arline back to her, her last tie to the dreary London suburb had snapped.

A day or two before she was to journey into Essex, she was in an obscure part of South London visiting a girl who had once been in her Sunday School class, but who was now dying slowly of consumption. The family had moved away from Phillis's neighbourhood, but she had never lost sight of Katy Dale, who, perhaps, because of a shadowy likeness to her sister Arline, had always been a favourite with her.

Katy welcomed her friend with enthusiasm.

"I thought you'd come to-night!" she said, eagerly; "and Miss Marston, mother wants me to tell you a story and ask you to help."

Mrs. Dale was a charwoman, a respectable, hard-working woman, who having only one child to provide for, and an allowance from her late husband's employer, was removed from the worst grip of poverty.

"I hope Mrs. Dale has no bad news of your brother," said Phillis, for the son had been something of a ne'er-do-well till shipped off to Australia by some Emigration Society.

"No; Tom's all right! It's a young lady where mother works."

And the story, shorn of Katy's explanations, was very short and very sad. Mrs. Dale, among other regular work, went once a week cleaning to a large, rather lonely house on Clapham Common, where lived a doctor and his wife. They had no family, and Dr. Foster did not practise. They were evidently poor; but from time to time they received 'paying guests,' for whom every comfort was provided, and who received every care and attention; enjoying, in fact, everything but liberty.

In a word, Dr. Foster kept a licensed home for the reception of not more than two patients suffering from dementia.

He observed the utmost secrecy, and his terms were considerably lower than those of many of his *confrères*; but he often went for months together without a 'case,' and being a poor man and unscrupulous, when he did gain an inmate, he did his utmost to keep them at any cost; taking no trouble to alleviate or attempt to cure their dread disease, since their return to sanity meant the loss of his income.

Generally, Mrs. Dale saw nothing of the patients, but the last arrival at Gadstone House was a young lady who was more jealously secluded and less kindly treated than any of the other inmates had been.

Mrs. Foster often went out for the day, leaving the poor girl locked up in her room, and on one of these occasions Mrs. Dale, touched by the sound of heart-breaking sobs, had managed to find her way unperceived to the window of the young stranger's prison, and ask if she could do anything for her. The window was small and high up, but by help of a kitchen chair (the Fosters kept no regular servant, so there was no one to report the charwoman's action), Mrs. Dale managed to look in; what she saw made her heart ache. The patient, a young girl, was fastened tightly in a chair, so that she could not move. The room was clean and tidy, fairly well furnished, but the look of misery and desolation

on the girl's face went to the good woman's heart.

With some difficulty she found a key which opened the door of the room where the girl was confined. She went in and spent a few minutes trying to soothe the sorrow-stricken creature.

"At first she would hardly speak to mother," went on Katy, "but after two or three times she grew to trust her, and then she told her her story. She's not mad, Miss Marston, but her stepfather hated her, and so he's told the Fosters she's insane, and just shut her up there. She's wanted mother badly to write a letter for her, but mother's no scholar. All she could think of was to tell you and ask you if you'd just send word to the lady yourself. You see, mother says mad people are that clever she may be mistaken, and the poor young lady be really insane after all; but she thought it couldn't do any harm if you just wrote and asked if it was true!"

"Why did not the young lady write herself?"

"She daren't; they won't let her have paper or pencil; and she says, poor thing! she has written before and her friends have taken no notice."

A sudden thought flashed through Phillis Marston's brain.

"Katy," she said, eagerly, "Is the young lady's name Rivers?"

"Yes; Meta Rivers, and the address she wants a letter sent to is Lady Hillington, Hillington Castle, Essex. Oh, Miss Marston, do you really know her? Will you write?"

"I will telegraph," said Phillis, brokenly. "Oh, Katy, you don't know what happiness your mother will have brought to friends of mine! I will telegraph at once! They will come up by a late train to-night, and by to-morrow Miss Rivers will be free!"

"And you won't betray mother! You know the Fosters is one of her best places; and she would not like to lose it."

"I will betray no one!" said Phillis. "Give me Dr. Foster's address, dear, and leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER XXV.

"I can give you M. R.'s address."

This was the missive which reached the Countess as she was dressing for dinner, and made her descend hurriedly to consult with her husband and son.

"Why does not Miss Marston tell us where Meta is?" asked Fane, impatiently. "This will make an interminable delay."

"Probably she was afraid to wire the full address," said his father. "Now, Geoff, don't be absurd; yesterday you would have been thankful to know you would see Meta in a week; now you make a fuss over a few hours' delay."

"I shall start at once," said Fane.

"You must do nothing of the kind; you have no right to appear in the matter. My dear boy," as his son's face fell, "only have patience; remember you are not Meta's betrothed, your appearance might even frighten her, and you certainly would have no power to convince her temporary guardians of your claim on her."

"Then what do you propose to do?" asked Fane, disconsolately; "you can't expect me to sit down with folded hands."

Lord Hillington was very patient.

"If you would only wait and hear me out, Geoff, you would understand I do not want any-thing of the kind. I propose to go to London myself to-night, and I hope Mrs. Barton and Dr. Gibson may accompany me. After her very unnatural mother, Penelope is Meta's next-of-kin, while Gibson has attended her from infancy and can testify to her sanity. Miss Marston can bear us out in saying that Bertram had no authority over Meta, and that his character was such, the law would have protected her from him."

"I think I can improve on the plan," said the Countess, smiling. "Geoff and I will join the party. You can leave us at the hotel while you go and force the people to surrender Meta. I am quite sure Geoff will be happier if he is actually in London, and though Mrs. Barton is Meta's

blood relation she is a stranger to her, while I have 'mothered' the poor girl all her life."

"You are quite right, dear," said the Earl, affectionately. "Geoff, if you want a vent for your superfluous energy, go and beat up Mrs. Barton and Dr. Gibson; say that we shall leave by the ten o'clock train, and put up at the Norfolk Hotel, but that they would probably be in time if they came up by the first train in the morning."

"And, Geoff," put in his mother, "telegraph to Miss Marston asking her to join us to-morrow morning, and, here she turned to her husband, 'Shall we want a lawyer?' "

"I can't say; it would not do any harm to take Rover."

On the whole Lord Fane found plenty to do in the interval before the train started, and his errands were so successful that doctor, lawyer, and aunt joined the three from the Castle on Hillington platform.

"Miss Marston has never set eyes on Meta," said the Countess, thoughtfully. "I wonder how she found her out?"

"I only hope it is not a false hope," remarked Penelope.

"I feel no fear of that," said the lawyer. "When the detective failed to trace Miss Rivers, I felt certain it was because she had not been placed in any regular asylum. There are, as Dr. Gibson will bear me out, black sheep in the medical profession as well as elsewhere, and some of these do not practise at all, but settle down in some obscure place, get one or two resident patients, and live out of them."

The party found accommodation at the Norfolk Hotel; but there was little sleep for Geoffrey Fane that night. He looked tired and ill when he joined the others at breakfast, and they had hardly finished when Miss Marston was announced.

She greeted them very quietly, and told her story with a modest self-possession which impressed them with its truth. She did not forget Katy's request, and begged as a special favour to herself that the charwoman's share in the discovery might not reach the Fosters.

"She will never need to 'char' for them again, Miss Marston," said Geoff, impetuously; "I'll take care of that."

In the end Phillis did not join in the expedition to Clapham. The Earl, who was a very practical man, thought the party had not better exceed four, there would then be room for Meta to drive back with them if (as he hoped) they succeeded in bearing her away from her prison.

A roomy brougham and pair came round punctually at ten o'clock, and the four started at once. Those who were left sat as if the morning would never end.

Phillis would gladly have relieved the mother and son of her presence; but the Countess begged her to remain.

"They cannot be back much under two hours," she said, brightly. "I want you to stay and keep me company. Geoff, I know, will be off to Covent Garden to see what flowers he can find to brighten up these rooms for Meta, poor child;" and the kind-hearted lady's eyes filled with tears. "How little I dreamed the last time she came to the Castle of all that was to happen before I saw her again."

When Lord Fane had left them, Phillis ventured to ask if Mrs. Bertram knew of their errand.

"I cannot say; she refuses all communication with us. I think myself that man acquired such a dominion over her that even his death cannot break the spell. I never liked Meta's mother; but I have felt very sorry for her lately."

"You saw Dr. Bertram often?" said Phil, eagerly. "Tell me, Lady Hillington, can you understand in what his wonderful power of fascination consisted?"

The Countess shook her head.

"I cannot, but I know it was there. Why Miss Marston, I am not a suspicious woman, but I refused to ask Dr. Bertram to the Castle lest his attractions should make havoc with my girls' hearts. I am not ambitious. I don't expect my daughters to make grand matches, but I could not have borne to know that one of them

was his wife. I cannot explain it to you; but just by looking at him I seemed to feel that he was heartless and wicked.

"And yet how my sister loved him."

"Ah! but she died before she discovered his true character!" said the Countess, "her death must have followed immediately after she had eaten the poisoned sweets, she had no time to realise her husband was a murderer. Cruelly as you have suffered through her loss, terrible as was her fate, it was yet the truest mercy to herself."

Phillis shuddered, but she felt the Countess was right, and uttered not one dissenting word.

"I am glad you are going to marry Paul Hardy," went on the great lady, "we are all very fond of him, and since the sorrow of your life happened at Hillington, you seem in some strange manner to belong to us."

"It is very kind of you to say so. I know he ought to have done better, and I can't help dreading seeing his people."

"You need not dread it in the least, Sir Claude is the kindest old gentleman I ever met, while Lady Hardy always sees things with her children's eyes. Molly is the only one whose judgment you might have feared. She is Paul's special sister, and so might perhaps have been critical of his bride; but I hear that Molly regards you as her special discovery, so you see all is well."

"Paul thinks Molly will be engaged herself before very long," volunteered Phillis.

"So does every one else who has seen her and Bob Ormond together," agreed the Countess, "for it was clearly a case of love at first sight. Well, she might do worse. Bob has been a little wild, but he is quite ready to reform and settle down. He has a large fortune, and, I do believe, a heart of gold, so that little Molly may be considered a very lucky girl."

The Vineyard, Clapham Common, has now been swept off the face of the earth through the ravages of the speculative builder, who loves to build streets of small houses on the site of one "mansion"; even the spot where it stood can hardly be identified.

In the Fosters' time it was a huge square barn-like house, rising in the middle of four acres of what might have been pleasure ground; but under the rule of people who boasted no gardener, looked more like a wilderness.

Lord Hillington rang at the bell till he was tired, then in despair he pushed the door open and walked in. Followed by his three companions, he made his way up a weed-strewn gravel path to the house, which looked terribly out of repair. Many of the windows were broken, the blinds were dirty and awry, while there was a marked lack of paint everywhere.

A short stout man, with a very red face, opened the door and looked askance at the intruders; probably his visitors did not generally come in fours.

"I wish to speak to you," began the Earl, "respecting a young lady now in your charge, Miss Rivers."

Foster shook his head.

"Never heard the name," he said, in an off-hand manner, "some mistake I suppose."

The Earl felt non-plussed, but Mr. Rover had taken Foster's measure accurately and now observed,—

"It will perhaps be better if we introduce ourselves, Dr. Foster. This is Lord Hillington, the nearest friend of the late Mr. Rivers. This lady, Mrs. Rivers-Barton, is the aunt of the girl we believe to be in your care. My friend here," and he touched the Doctor's arm, "is the family physician who can testify to her sanity and I am the lawyer to the estate. In my latter capacity I had better tell you plainly that we know Miss Rivers to be here. We are quite willing to believe that you received her under a mistake, being taken in by her stepfather, a most plausible scoundrel; but if you oppose our wish to see Miss Rivers, we shall have to regard you as his accomplice."

Foster felt staggered.

"I have only one patient," he persisted, "and her name is not Rivers."

"Is it Bertram?" Then seeing he was right,

"I suppose her stepfather thought it safer to place her here in his own name."

"He paid a month in advance," said Foster, "and was to have sent another cheque last week; but it did not come."

"It never can come. Dr. Bertram died by his own hand;" then seeing the effect of his words, he added, "you will never get another penny for detaining Miss Rivers, and the attempt to do so may bring on yourself a criminal prosecution."

Dr. Foster was visibly impressed. In a few minutes he had capitulated all down the line, and sent for his wife to conduct Mrs. Barton to his "dear young friend."

Metsa looked up in bewilderment as Mrs. Foster ushered in a stranger. The doctor's wife being able to keep watch over her prisoner today, there were no cruel cords fastening the girl to a chain, she was sitting over the fire, but with a look of terror on her face which went to Penelope's heart.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, flinging her arms round the girl and kissing her, "what have they done to you? You don't know me; but I am your Aunt Penelope, and I started from New York the day after I got your letter."

"Aunt Penelope!" then came a faint look of hope into the sunken eyes, "Aunt Penelope, pa's own sister?"

"Yes, my dear, and a very determined woman she is, too, quite able to take care of you and fight your battles. And now will you put on your things? I am going to take you away."

"Not to Banksyde," pleaded Metsa, "I could not bear it!"

"No, not to Banksyde, only to an hotel on the Embankment, where you will find an old friend, Lady Hillington is waiting there for you; her husband came here with me."

"And they have forgiven me!"

"There was nothing to forgive; they know what happened was not your fault. I think they are 'real grit' all round, as we say in America. I never cared for the Countess when I knew her as a young woman, but years have ripened her, and now on the whole I think she is quite good enough for her husband."

At Dr. Gibson's wish no one spoke to Metsa of the events of the past few weeks. The kind old man declared that she must hear nothing of the tragedy at Banksyde until she had recovered in some measure from all she had gone through.

Mrs. Barton took a villa at Bournemouth, and there after a few days she removed with Metsa, accompanied by Lord Fane, who had settled matters with his little love very much to his own satisfaction, and in the pleasant Southern watering place the girl gradually recovered from the terrible haunting dread in which she had lived so long.

Very early in the new year Mrs. Barton heard a piece of news which made her feel thankful Metsa's engagement was a fact. Mrs. Bertram, after being a *malade imaginaire* for years had died quite suddenly of apoplexy; fortunately, Dr. Gibson reached Banksyde before the end, and so could give the necessary certificate, and spare the survivors the pain and publicity of an inquest.

The woman who had cordially detested her sister-in-law in life, could afford to pity her now she was dead; it seemed to Penelope that Metsa's mother had made mistakes all down the line.

Very gently she broke the truth to Metsa; she told her the whole story of that sad autumn, beginning with the cruel charge against Paul Hardy, and ending with Dr. Bertram's suicide, and the death of his widow.

"And he was really Mrs. Ashlyn's husband, Aunt Penelope; she was so pretty. I felt sorry for her the moment I saw her."

"Well, my dear, she was Dr. Bertram's wife, and must have had a very miserable life if she had lived. Her sister is one of the nicest girls I ever met. She is going to marry Mr. Hardy so I daresay you will know her later on."

"And poor mother died quite alone. Do you think she believed in Dr. Bertram to the last?"

"I know she would never admit his guilt."

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Metsa, can you bear to tell me now how you came to be at that dreadful doctor's at Clapham?"

"Dr. Bertram and Nurse Margaret took me there. I do not think really she was a nurse, though, I always fancied she was mixed up in some way with Dr. Bertram."

"His sister, perhaps. There was a sister at his funeral, quite a poor, working woman."

"I don't think she meant to be unkind to me," said Metsa, dreamily. "She was just his tool. Aunt Penelope, isn't it wonderful how much has happened since poor Mrs. Ashlyn came to Hillington, and yet it is barely six months!"

"I want to see something more happen before I go back to America," said Mrs. Barton. "Metsa, I can't leave you until I have seen you married and safe in your husband's care."

"But we have only been engaged a few weeks, Aunt Penelope."

"You have known each other all your lives, and this sad event at Banksyde leaves you your own mistress. Besides, your own home is close to the Castle, and Lady Hillington will treat you as another daughter. Geoff and I have talked it over, and we think the best plan would be for you to marry here quietly. Then he can take you abroad for the rest of the winter, and in the spring when your story is not in everybody's mouth, he can bring you home to Banksyde."

Lord Fane pleaded his own cause later, and pleaded it so well that Metsa gave way. After all, she desired nothing so much as to belong to him, and, to have the right to be with him always. Once convinced that the Earl and Countess approved of a speedy marriage she raised no objection, only stipulating the ceremony should be of the quietest description.

So one cold January day the Vicar of Combe Martin (whose own wedding was only a week distant), arrived in Bournemouth in time to perform the marriage; and, directly it was over, Lord and Lady Fane departed for Southampton, whence they would cross to Bordeaux.

Lord Hillington and Mrs. Barton, the two "survivors," discussed the bridal pair very cheerfully.

"It is a love match on both sides," said the Earl. "They were boy and girl together, and understand each other thoroughly. I prophesy they will be very happy!"

Penelope thought for a moment of another pair who had been "boy and girl together," and whose attachment had not led to matrimony. How heart-broken she had felt when her old comrade married another girl. How she had detested his bride. Well, years must have taken the sting out of her disappointment, for she could meet Lord Hillington now as an old friend, and could confess that his wife was worthy of him.

Still it is possible that the recollection of her old romance, and the nearness of Banksyde to the Castle, influenced Penelope to return to America.

"I will come back to you if ever you are in trouble," she told her niece.

But if Mrs. Barton waits for this contingency before she visits her niece, Banksyde may be years without a sight of her; for the general opinion in Hillington is that never was marriage happier or more successful than Lady Fane's.

Gates had returned to his old post and rules the establishment at Banksyde with a despotic sway. There Nurse Green has more than once spent her holiday, and there a charming room has been set apart for the time when Aunt Penelope comes home, and meanwhile is used by no one else.

Paul Hardy and his wife are close friends of the Fanes. Phillis and Metsa "took to" each other from the first; perhaps the thought of a lonely grave in the peaceful churchyard drew them together, for Phill can never forget the kindness shown by Metsa to her poor little sister.

Phillis, who once had no girl friend but Arline, can now boast at least three intimate ones, for Metsa, and Ida Fane, and Molly Ormond all have for her a special regard; while old Lady Hardy loves her dearly, and declares that she never could have spared Molly if Paul's wife had not been such a true daughter to her.

For which Mr. Robert Ormond ought to have

been deeply grateful to Phillis; as, perhaps, he is.

There is a grave in Hillington churchyard, and which strangers always single out for admiration because of the choice hot-house flowers which loving fingers always place there. For the rest a cross of pure white marble marks the spot, and on it is inscribed, in clear black lettering, the one name "Arline," her age, and the date of a certain July day.

And when strangers wonder at the brevity of the inscription, and ask for the history of the quiet sleeper, they are answered by the story of the

"TRAGEDY AT ROSE COTTAGE."

[THE END.]

THE DOCTOR'S SECRET.

—:-:

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARIA LE CLEROQ laughed uneasily at the old housekeeper's uncanny prophecy—that trouble would come of her marriage.

"I have no fear for my future," she said, thoughtfully. "One should not be fearful of crossing a bridge until one is reached. I have always lived a good, true life; why should Heaven be so unkind to me as to send me a cruel husband!"

"Those are the kind of women who always get scamps for husbands," muttered the housekeeper, adding: "I will see about the nice little supper being all ready, Miss Maria—pardon me, Mrs. Le Clercq, I mean. I suppose you are going away on a trip after that?" this interrogatively.

"Yes," murmured Maria, "my—my husband said we were to take the 9:30 express for Clareville. We shall not remain long away. I want you to take care of everything nicely while I am gone, the poor old soul upstairs included. I shall offer her a home with me when she recovers. She reminds me of my poor old mother. I could not bear to send her back to the workhouse."

"She shall be well attended to, ma'am;" and the old housekeeper said to herself; "What an angel she is, to think of the old and helpless, and make arrangements for their comfort on this, her wedding-night. May Heaven send her good luck for it."

She helped her mistress to don the dress she intended to travel in. Ah, how nervous she was! How her hands trembled, and how cold they were, despite the two pink hectic spots which burned on either cheek!

"Do I look well in this costume?" she asked, dubiously, as the last finishing touches were being put to her toilet; and she looked long and breathlessly into the mirror. "Somewhat the idea comes to me that it does not become me."

"Why, what can you mean, ma'am?" exclaimed the housekeeper. "I thought you liked that dress the best of any you ever had; that's what you said when you and I were finishing it."

"Somehow I fancy that it—it—makes me look a little—old," murmured Maria, flushing painfully.

"Not any older than usual," declared the housekeeper.

Maria turned quickly and caught her by the hand.

"I want to ask you a plain question," she said, huskily, "and I want you to tell me the truth."

"I shall never tell you anything else but the truth, Miss Maria—Mrs. LeClercq, I mean," was the quick reply.

For a moment she was silent, then she spoke, and the words seemed to cost her a great effort.

"If you were to see me now—for the first time—how—how—old should you take me to be?" she asked, with a husky quiver in her voice.

"You always did look a little older than you

really are, Miss Maria—bless me! I can never remember to call you Mrs. LeClercq. I know you are only thirty; but any one else would take you to be as much as thirty-five."

She saw at once, when it was too late, what mischief her answer had done. The poor bride's face grew white and haggard, and she burst into tears.

"Dear me—dear me, what have I done now!" cried the old housekeeper all in a flutter. "Oh, dear, don't cry, that's a good creature. I didn't think you'd take the truth in that way."

By a great effort Maria gulped down her sobs, and smiled bravely up into the housekeeper's worried face. But ah, me, what a pitifully sad smile it was, sadder than any tears could have been!

"I suppose it is wrong to cry out against Heaven because one cannot stay young, when—when—the season of youth has passed, and because one's face shows the finger-marks of time," she murmured, more to herself than her companion, who stood regarding her anxiously. "You may leave me now," she added, aloud. "Call me when—when—Mr.—my—my husband comes in."

The next hour that Maria LeClercq spent, standing alone before her mirror, was one of the saddest of her life. For the first time she realized she had made a mistake in marrying handsome, dashing, Augustus LeClercq, who was not a day over eight-and-twenty, and scarcely looked as old as that. Would she live to rue this sudden marriage? The words of the old adage came forcibly to her mind. "Those who marry in haste repent at their leisure."

"He loves me," she whispered to herself; and she tried to take comfort in that assertion.

Then the troublesome, torturing thought came to her—would he have married her if she had been poor? She tried to drive the thought from her by placing her mind on something else. But it was useless. The conflicting doubts refused to be banished.

The more she looked at herself in the mirror the more she realized how unfitted she was to be the bride of the gay, brilliant man she had just wedded. Would her marriage turn out a happy one? Ah, if she could but read the future, she told herself, wistfully. Poor soul! it was well for her that she could not see what was in store for her.

She tried to recall all that she had ever read or heard about lucky or unlucky marriages. Suddenly she remembered that among a pile of musty books which had been relegated long since to the attic, was one containing the very information she desired. Breathless with excitement Maria went quickly to the attic, and, after a long search, she found the coveted book. Hurrying back to her room, she carefully dusted the worn covers and sat down to read. She found the page with but little difficulty. Ah, what would it tell her? She fairly trembled as she held her finger between the pages of the closed volume a moment to gather courage.

Then suddenly she remembered that it was Friday, and it was the thirteenth day of the month. Her face blanched, but she opened the book bravely. At the first line a terrible chill struck her heart, and the blood seemed to fairly turn to ice in her veins. The first sentence that met her eye was:

"Few girls are dauntless enough to risk being married on Friday, and no one should be tempted to wed a prince or a Romeo on the thirteenth day of the month. There are certain dates upon the calendar which cannot be fixed upon for 'the happy day.' If the fever of matrimony is working in your brain, consult the following list of unlucky days, and be governed accordingly:

January 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 10th, 13th, 15th; February 6th, 7th, 13th, 18th; March 1st, 6th, 8th, 13th; April 6th, 11th, 13th; May 5th, 6th, 7th, 13th; June 7th, 13th, 15th; July 5th, 13th, 19th; August 13th, 16th, 19th; September 6th, 7th, 13th; October 6th, 13th; November 13th, 15th, 16th, and December 13th, 15th, 16th, 17th.

"These particular days are warranted to blight the lives of the truest lovers ever seen, but they are not the only snare which threaten

the matrimonially inclined, for there is also a true little verse which reads:

"Monday for wealth,
Tuesday for health,
Wednesday the best day of all;
Thursday for crosses,
Friday for losses,
Saturday no luck at all."

"Having learned the particular days to be avoided, the feverish lover may think he can breathe freely. Not yet. The plot thickens. The tangle is still further aggravated by the moon—such potent factor in all human affairs. A wedding should take place only when the moon is full, as that alone can dispel the black clouds which hang over the voyage of wedded life; and another warning cuts the matrimonial season down to still narrower limits, for no one must marry during Lent."

"In conclusion, it may be as well to add the old adage, which our grandmothers strictly adhered to. No bride should step before the minister who is to perform the ceremony without having on

"Something old and something new;
Something borrowed and something blue."

It is also unlucky to be wedded in a dark dress, or one which has seen much wear."

The book fell from Maria's cold hands to the floor, and a low, bitter sob echoed through the room; but the next moment she aroused herself.

"Pshaw!" she said. "I—I—will not believe all this. I—I should be miserable for life if I did."

She tried to smile, but the cold, white lips refused to do her bidding. Instead, they quivered piteously, and a great tear rolled down her pallid cheek and splashed upon her hand.

She sprang to her feet in fright.

"Gus must not return and find me weeping," she whispered, "nor must he find me reading anything like this. He—he—might think me superstitious, and—and—I should not like him to have that opinion of me," and she sighed dejectedly.

She looked up anxiously at the little old-fashioned clock on the mantel, which was slowly ticking away the moments and hours of her life.

"Eight o'clock!" she exclaimed, with a start of amazement. "What can keep him I wonder? I am sure he told me he would not be gone long."

At that moment there was a loud peal at the bell.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

At the sound of the bell the colour flamed up into Maria's pale cheeks, and she pressed her hand tightly over her swiftly pulsing heart.

"He has come at last!" she whispered, womanlike, taking a quick glance into the looking-glass to see how she would appear in his eyes when he entered.

The next moment she heard the housekeeper's heavy step outside, and then her light tap upon the door.

"Come in," she said, eagerly; and she wondered if she could hear the loud beating of her heart.

"She has come to tell me that—my—my husband is here," she thought; and a smile that made her plain face almost beautiful crept up to her lips.

"I rang the bell," said the housekeeper, thrusting her head in at the door; "but I guess you did not hear it."

"You rang the bell?" said Maria in a tone of keen disappointment. "Why, I—I thought it was the—the—street-door bell."

"No, ma'am; it was the kitchen bell. The supper has been cooked for nearly two hours, and is all spoiled now. I want to know what you want done with it. You'd better come downstairs and eat. The gent, does not seem in a hurry to return."

"We will wait a little longer," said Maria. "He must be here soon."

"No doubt he has forgotten all about being married," returned the housekeeper.

It was evident that she was not in the best of humour. Nothing could make her more angry than to see a nice supper ruined, and she had taken especial pains with this feast.

"I hope you have dined," returned Maria, taking no notice of the last remark.

"What! dine before the bride did! No, indeed!"

"You had better do so at once," said Maria, anxiously. "I—I—shall wait for—my—husband."

"A pretty wait you had of it already, ma'am," grumbled the old housekeeper. "And what puts me out so it, he doesn't seem to regard you in the matter at all. Wherever he is, he must know that you are hungry, and that you will be foolish enough to sit here and wait for him. I don't like to see a man commence married life in that way. Why, he couldn't do worse if he had been married ten years. I shouldn't be surprised if he did not come until to-morrow morning—not one bit. Men are not to be trusted—leastwise, most of 'em. You never know where they are going when they get out of your sight, and you can never be sure when they will come back, or if they will return at all. You want to give him a piece of your mind for this. Mark my words, if you don't, he will play this trick on you again, or maybe a worse one."

Maria rose to her feet, holding up her hand with a dignified gesture.

"Please remember that you are speaking of—my husband," she said, with a sweet womanly dignity and sorrowfulness that brought the housekeeper to her senses at once, and made her feel a trifle ashamed of airing her opinion unasked.

"Forgive me for making so bold as to free my mind as I did, Miss Maria—Mrs. LeClercq, I mean—but I've known you since you were a little wee thing in your poor ma's arms, and—and—I love you, I do indeed Maria, and I can't bear to have you treated so."

"I will pardon your remarks," said Maria, gravely; "but for my sake, because it grieves me so greatly, I trust you will not repeat the offence. I want you to respect the gentleman whose wife I now am, and—and to learn to love him for his nobility as I do."

"I'll not say any more about him; but as to respecting the gent, he must prove himself worthy, ma'am. But to get back to the supper question, do let me bring you at least a cup of tea, Miss Maria—ma'am, I mean—it will do you a heap of good, it will bring the colour to your cheeks, and—well, to tell you the truth, you're beginning to look awfully haggard. I'll brew you a cup nice and hot and strong, just the way you like. Won't you let me bring it up?"

No argument could have been more effective than that she was looking haggard.

"I think I will take the tea. It will do me good; it always does. I am sure that will not impair my appetite. I am feeling a little faint."

When it was brought her, she drank the tea with great relish, and it revived her greatly.

She was glad the housekeeper quitted the room without again referring to the spoiled supper, though she saw her glance at the clock, and at that moment it struck slowly the hour of nine.

Nine! ah, what could detain him? She asked herself the question in great agitation over and over again, as she slowly paced the length of the room, stopping every now and then to part the white muslin curtains, and look anxiously up and down the gay street at some belated pedestrian in the distance who was rapidly approaching.

As they passed the house one by one her heart sank within her.

"Perhaps he is ill somewhere," she thought in great alarm.

Slowly the clock on the mantel chimed the hour of ten, then another half, and while she still watched and waited, the hands on the dial crept around to eleven.

Again the housekeeper put her head in at the door, and her heart ached for the lonely woman

—the bride of a few short hours—standing there, her face fairly glued to the window.

"I have brought you a little something on this tray, ma'am," she said. "You must try and eat something to keep you up."

"I could not eat anything to save my life, but I thank you for being so thoughtful," said Maria, gratefully.

"At least let me sit with you a little while, ma'am," pleaded the old housekeeper.

"The time won't drag so heavily on your hands if you have some one to talk to. Don't say no, Miss Maria—Mrs. LeClercq, I mean—please don't."

"You can come in if you really desire to do so," replied Maria—"that is, if you can leave your patient, poor old Mrs. Moore. By the way, I quite forgot to look into her room since this morning. Has Doctor Forbes been here? He was to call this afternoon or evening."

"He has come and gone ma'am," returned the housekeeper. "I did not disturb you."

"Does he find Mrs. Moore's condition changed?"

"Her mind is still wandering, poor old soul; but he has great hopes of bringing her round all right. Now, there's a grand gentleman," continued the old housekeeper, enthusiastically.

"Every one blesses the ground he walks on; he has no false airs about him. Why, I couldn't help crying, in spite of myself, to see him take that poor old body's thin, wasted hands in his own white, strong ones so caressingly. He actually hated to leave her bedside. If she were a young and beautiful girl, I would declare that the handsome young doctor had fallen desperately in love with his patient."

She did not add that at every visit Doctor Gordon Forbes had slipped a bank-note into her hand, anxiously asking her to give his patient great attention.

"He has indeed a most noble nature," assented Maria; and deep down in her heart she wished that the man she had wedded had been more like him.

The half hour struck again; but neither Maria nor the housekeeper pretended to notice it, the latter talking faster than ever, to divert her mistress's attention; but when the hour of twelve struck, she looked anxiously at Maria.

"I could guarantee that he will not be here to-night, ma'am," she declared. "Do go to your rest. If need be, I can sit up and wait for him until daybreak. It won't matter how I look tomorrow, but you must not look all fagged out. Men never like to see a woman looking ill, you know."

"I will lie down on the sofa just as I am," said Maria in a low, unsteady voice.

"If I should happen to fall asleep, awaken me if the street-door bell rings. You can sit where you are by the fire for a little while longer, if you are sure you do not feel tired."

The old housekeeper noticed with the greatest pity how weakly she sunk back among the welcoming cushions.

"Poor creature, she has been badly sold in this marriage of hers," she ruminated, gazing sadly at her.

She was quite right. Maria was indeed fagged out, as she had phrased it, and in spite of her determination not to allow herself to go to sleep, tired nature soon asserted itself. She soon fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

"Yes, she's got badly sold, poor girl," she muttered, pityingly, "and she's just begun to learn that which I have seen all along—that he's a grand rascal despite his fine ways. I'm afraid he will lead her a wild dance, and with worry and trouble she won't last long, poor thing; and that will be exactly what he has planned—to get her out of the way as soon as possible and get possession of her money. She's a clever woman, but even the smartest of 'em can be taken in by a smooth-tongued man. Bless me, if there isn't that bell now, and it nigh on to one o'clock. He's come at last, has he?"

She noticed that Maria did not even hear the bell. She was sleeping the sleep of one thoroughly exhausted.

Again the housekeeper put her head in at the door, and her heart ached for the lonely woman

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WELL you were long enough in concluding whether or not you would come to the door," growled Augustus LeClercq, brushing past her.

"I'll teach you better than to keep me standing out in the snow and sleet on a devil of a night like this—depend upon that. Where's Maria?"

"I will call her, sir," she answered, "if you will please step into the parlour. I don't think she expected you would return when it got so late."

"Humph," he ejaculated, entering the cosy little parlour with steps that were by no means steady.

"Thunder and lightning! it's as cold as a barn in here," he exclaimed, emerging into the hall again; adding: "See here; I want you to go down to the kitchen and cook up something hot, and in mighty short time—the best you have in the house. Do you hear?" he cried, angrily, as she stood hesitating on the lower stair.

It made the blood boil in her veins to see this strange, arrogant man ordering things about in poor Maria's home—taking the reins in his own hands so very soon.

"Did you hear what I said? What are you standing there for? Move on at once, I say."

"The cook has retired long since, sir," she answered, quietly. "I am the housekeeper here."

"Well, what's the matter with you setting to and cooking up a meal, I should like to know!" he demanded, angrily. "Below your position, eh?"

"I have never been called upon to cook, sir," she returned, her eyes blazing angrily; "but if Miss Maria—Mrs. LeClercq, I mean—requests me to do so, it shall be done." I will speak to her about it."

"You are taking the order from me," he cried, angrily. "Either go down to that kitchen and cook up a thundering good meal in double-quick time, or pack up your trunk and clear out. You will soon learn, I fancy, that I am lord and master of this house from this time on."

The housekeeper was no longer young. She had grown aged and grey in Miss Smithson's service. She knew, at her time of life, getting another home would not be easily done; and like a wise woman, she swallowed her bitter anger and put her pride in her pocket, and replied, in as even a tone of voice as she could command,

"Very well, sir; I will do my best to carry out your wishes. It will not take me long."

The sound of the loud, angry voice had awakened Maria, and she sprang quickly from the couch and opened the door in the hall-way above just in time to hear the housekeeper's last remark.

She hurried down to the little parlour, her cheeks flushing, her heart throbbing.

Augustus LeClercq was pacing up and down the room, wearing his fur-lined overcoat, his face bearing a decided frown.

"I am so glad you are here at—last—Gus," she murmured.

"What kept you away so long? Where have you been?"

"Don't commence that," he cried, angrily.

"Nothing makes a man so mad as to have a woman attempt to keep tabs on him. If you want to get along well with me, don't begin that. I won't have it, I say. I'm not a school-boy, to be obliged to report on my actions."

Maria started back as though she had been shot, her face turning pale as death. She saw at a glance what was the matter—Gus was deeply under the influence of wine.

He had always been the very image of a thorough gentleman before; now, on their marriage night, she saw him in his true colours—a man who had been playing a part, and was now throwing off the rôle he had assumed.

Muddled though his brain was, he saw he had gone a step too far. He came up close to her, laughing aloud.—

"Don't be a goose, Maria, to take what I said as hard as that. I was a little bit annoyed, and spoke harsher than I intended to."

He tried to kiss her, just to make her good-natured; he told himself; but she drew back.

She had a horror of liquor and of those who indulged in it. The odour of his breath made her feel as faint as death.

"All right; if you don't want to kiss me, I shall not ask again for one. I promise you there are scores of girls, young and beautiful too, who wouldn't be so coy with me," he declared, shilly, flinging himself down, with his wet, dripping overcoat on, in one of the best chairs. "I've ordered something to eat," he went on. "You should have had something ready for me when I came in."

"We dined at six," said Maria, simply. "Everything was in readiness then."

"We," he repeated, scornfully. "Why don't you say you eat at six? I don't have any regular time. When I come home hungry I expect to have supper got ready, no matter what time it is; that's my style of living."

"If there is anything I detest above all things it is to be tied down to certain rules and regulations—when to get up, when to eat, and when to go to bed. It would drive me crazy in less than a week, I assure you."

"Have you got anything in the way of something to drink in the house? If not, I'll have to step out for some. You see, I have a terrible cold, and the doctor said, 'The best cure is to sweat it out, my dear LeClercq. Take a little rock and rye. Rather hard to take, I admit, but it will bring you round in no time.' I took the rye, but I couldn't down the rock. I don't seem to object to the treatments as much as I thought I should—in fact, it tasted rather morish."

"As you know, Gus, we never have anything of that kind in the house," she said, gravely, adding, "Except in case of sickness. We sent out this evening for a bottle of brandy for the poor old sick woman beneath this roof; but, of course, that was different."

"The very thing!" exclaimed LeClercq, joyfully. "Run and bring it to me as quickly as you can, Maria, and in less time than it takes to tell it, I'll show you how to make the finest cocktail that a man ever drank. Brandy! That's lucky! What brandy is it? I hope to goodness it's something good!"

Maria drew back, looking at him in amazement not unmixed with horror.

"I said it was bought for medicinal purposes," she said in a low voice, husky with suppressed tears.

"Well, didn't I tell you I was ill?" he cried, laughing uproariously. "Don't stand upon ceremony, Maria. Run and fetch the bottle of brandy, Maria. I can't eat a mouthful until I get something of the kind. You wouldn't like to see me go out in the teeth of this bitter storm for some, would you? and I swear I'll go unless you bring it at once. Hurry up, that's a good woman."

She looked at him with a look in her eyes so despairing, so full-of-woe, that he never forgot it in all the long years of his after life. She realised that he had been indulging freely, and she feared the effects of additional imbibing.

As she stood there looking at him, she knew that her idol had crumbled into dust and lay in ruins at her feet. She knew that she had forged a martyr's chain for herself; but she only answered firmly—

"I cannot take it from a sick woman to give it to you. Say to yourself, 'I will do without it.' Make a firm resolve. I will help you to keep it."

He muttered something under his breath that sounded very much like a fiasco impression. He saw that in this case discretion was the better part of valour. She was firm. He must pretend to yield to her; but have that brandy he would. But he must use strategy to get it—not force.

"Your will is my law, darling Maria—sweetest wife that man ever won," he cried, trying a new tack, remembering that flattery, put on good and heavy, always softened women's hearts.

The words, and the carew which accompanied them, completely misled Maria. She looked up into his face, her eyes full of tears.

"I see you have been putting on all this harshness to find out what I would do or say," she murmured, smiling through her tears. "It was unkind of you, Gus."

"I am afraid I talked just a trifle too loud,"

he admitted. "I hope the sick woman did not hear me, for it might have disturbed her. Is she directly over this room we are sitting in?"

"No," replied Maria, gratified at the interest he was taking in the poor old sick woman; "she is in the room to the rear of it. She is a light sleeper, still, I think she has not been disturbed. I should have felt sorry had she been."

"Will you do me a favour, Maria?" he asked. "It is the first one I have asked of you," he added, laughingly.

"If it is in my power," she answered, slowly, wondering if he was intending to ask her for more money.

"Well, then, my precious love, my angel—dearest of all darlings, my adored one, will you go down to the kitchen and hurry matters up?"

"I can do that by calling down the tube," she answered, brightly.

"Do it!" he muttered under his breath. But he was equal to the occasion. "I was just about to add, will you go down and prepare some simple little dish with your own fair hands, my love! It would make the plainest supper a feast fit for the gods."

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied Maria, brightly, and she hurried from the room with a happy smile on her lips. "Shall it be a salad?" she asked, pausing on the threshold.

"Oh, anything you like," he answered, carelessly.

The soft *froufrou* of her skirts had scarcely died away ere he crept out into the hall-way.

"The coast is clear," he muttered, bounding up the stair-way two steps at a time. "Now for that brandy. The room to the rear? Ah, here it is."

Without ceremony he turned the knob and entered. The light was turned low, and shaded, but he saw what he was looking for on a stand by the bedside—a bottle with a glass beside it. Just as he reached it, a scream issued from the bed.

"Curse you!" cried LeClercq, hoarsely, "I'll fix you for this!" And in an instant his white hands closed tightly round her neck.

CHAPTER XL

As Gus LeClercq's white hands tightened on the emaciated throat of the sick woman, she sank back lifeless upon the pillow.

"Curse the old fool, she would have it!" he muttered. "Why did she give the alarm and bring everyone in the house up here?"

Seizing the night-lamp, he held it down close by her face.

"She has fainted!" he muttered, "I thought at first that she had shaken off this mortal coil."

This was all the attention that he vouchsafed her. Grasping the bottle, he poured out in the tumbler a copious draught, which he quickly swallowed. This did not seem to satisfy him. Another and another were drained in rapid succession.

"First time that I ever knew women could select a good brand of liquor," he muttered, smacking his lips. "This is fine cognac!" He held the bottle up to the light. "Why, good Heaven! I have drunk nearly half of it, he muttered. "Still, it's so mighty good that I fancy a little more wouldn't harm me."

Without taking time to pour the remainder into a glass, he raised the bottle to his lips and tossed off its contents.

"Mighty fine stuff!" he remarked, smacking his lips. "I'll find out where that came from. It's fit for the gods. I must get out of here before Maria returns. There would be a deuce of a row if she were to discover what I have done, she's such an old prude of a person."

Creeping cautiously along the hall as quickly as his unsteady legs would carry him, he made his way to the room, where, a few moments later, Maria was astonished to hear guffaws of uncontrollable laughter.

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Both she and the housekeeper paused to listen. "What can be the matter?" exclaimed the housekeeper, nervously.

"I am sure I don't know," returned Maria, in wonder. "I had better run up and see."

The sight that met her gaze as she entered the room was engraved on her mind ever afterwards.

Gus LeClercq was standing in the centre of the room, swaying to and fro, first on one foot then on the other, in a state of wild and hilarious intoxication.

"Hic! the old girl won't notice it!" he ejaculated. Hic—"

At that moment he beheld her standing speechless in the doorway.

"Good-evening—hic—Maria!" he exclaimed; and endeavouring to make a low bow, he tumbled to the floor at her feet.

Maria's cry of terror brought the housekeeper flying to her side. She comprehended all in a trice.

"Oh, good Heavens!" she cried, "this is a terrible calamity! Don't cry, Maria, poor woman; you will arouse the neighbourhood, and it won't do any good."

He was scrambling on all fours in his vain attempt to regain his feet. It would have been a ludicrous sight to the old housekeeper had it not been for Maria's feelings, which she did not wish to hurt by giving vent to her amusement.

By main force she succeeded in getting him upon his unsteady feet, still keeping a tight hold of him.

"This—this—floor is most terribly slippery," he remarked, in his maudlin fashion, "and my shoes are pretty damp."

Suddenly he remembered the meal—the supper.

"Got that meal cooked yet?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered; adding in a low tone to Maria, "I think the wisest course would be to set the table in here, rather than to ask the gentleman to go down to the dining-room. You know we have just been oiling the stairs, and it might be too slippery for him."

Maria's look of gratitude thanked her for her tact. She could not have uttered a word to save her life.

She sank down upon the nearest chair, white as a snow-drop, and completely unnerved.

"I will have him all right in a very few moments," said the housekeeper.

In a few seconds she returned with a foaming beverage.

"Drink this," she said, pressing the glass to his lips, and refusing to take it away until he drained it to the dregs.

Maria soon saw the effect of this. In a very few moments the decoction soothed him completely.

He was not quite steady upon his feet, but he knew what was transpiring about him.

"A mighty nice little supper," he cried, as the smoking viands were set before him. "Lobster patties, anchovy salad, and potatoes hashed in cream," he cried, rubbing his hands with an air of great satisfaction. "Now, if you had a little clam-broth as an appetiser, this would be a feast fit for the gods!"

Maria made no remark. She could only sit opposite him and look into his face, with an expression of dumb agony which words could not describe.

"Why don't you fall to and eat something?" he demanded. "I like women with hearty appetites, who can eat as often as I do—and drink with me, too, as far as that's concerned. Why don't you talk?" he cried at last, exasperated by her silence. "Good Heavens! it's maddening, sitting here opposite a dummy. I say, will you always be able to hold your tongue like that? In olden times they had to cut out the tongues of shrews that men might have peace and quiet in their own homes. I reckon I won't have to do that by you, for, by George! you're too quiet."

And he laughed uproariously at what he considered a fine joke.

The tears welled up in Maria's eyes, and rolled down her cheeks, despite her valiant effort to keep them back.

"Crying, eh?" he cried, dropping his knife and fork with a crash. "Now, isn't a man to be

pitted, to have to sit opposite an object like that? Good Heavens! it's worth twice four millions, to have to sit opposite a crying creature like you."

Maria vouchsafed no reply, but the tears rolled down the swifter.

With an exclamation of disgust, he fell to eating again, muttering maledictions against old girls in general.

How had he got in this condition, Maria wondered. He was certainly not so bad as this when he entered.

She bowed her head in her hands, giving way to the most passionate grief she had ever known.

She expected more insults from him, but, instead, he took her tears very quietly, uttering not so much as one word of comment.

Raising her head, she saw, much to her surprise, that he was fast asleep. Trembling like an aspen-leaf, Maria sprang to her feet, and fairly flew down into the kitchen, where the housekeeper was preparing a dainty dessert.

With the most pitiful tears that ever were shed, Maria flung herself into the woman's arms, crying out:

"Oh, what shall I do? Tell me what I must do! My heart is breaking!"

"Where is he?" asked the housekeeper, anxiously, wondering if he were threatening to go out into the street for liquor.

"He is sitting at the table, asleep, swaying to and fro. I expect every moment to hear him fall to the floor."

Good Heavens, save us!" ejaculated the housekeeper, in horror. "You asked me what you ought to do, Miss Maria. Now listen, and I will advise you: Go straight to your room and lie down, and leave the rest to me. I will see that he is made comfortable on the sofa in the parlour, and will put a good, heavy shawl over him. It would be very embarrassing for him to wake and find you near him. I will remove all traces of the supper, and he will not be able to remember just what happened. I will say, so that he will be less ashamed, that I admitted him, and that you did not see him."

"I cannot let you tell a falsehood," said Maria.

"Now listen to me, my dear young woman," returned the housekeeper, energetically. "If he were to think you saw him, he would throw off all restraint and not care a particle. Depend upon it, my advice is good. It is two o'clock, child. Now you'd better go direct to your room."

Maria was too much exhausted to hold out for further urging.

"You miserable, besotted wretch!" exclaimed the housekeeper, as she stood on the threshold of the parlour. "I know what I should do, if I dared," she muttered, as she entered the parlour alone, clutching her fist and shaking it at the unconscious object of her rage, who was snoring sonorously before the viands she had taken such pains to prepare, "and that is, to take you by the neck, and fling you out of the window."

She removed the edibles with alacrity, and returned; then, dragging him by main force to the sofa, she dumped him down upon it, thrusting a sofa-pillow under his head.

"Heaven pity the woman you have wedded!" she muttered. "You will lead her a sad enough life of it. I suppose the only thing to do is to sit and watch her beside you, to see that you don't roll off the sofa and break your miserable neck. I ought to be up sitting with poor old Mrs. Moore; but I guess she'll sleep until morning, she was resting so very quietly when I put my head in at the door a few moments since."

The old lady was so completely exhausted that, try as hard as she could to keep awake, sleep at last overpowered her.

The sun was high in the heavens when she opened her eyes. For a moment all that had transpired seemed like a dream to her, then in an instant she remembered all. In that instant, too, her eyes fell upon the sofa. She could hardly believe her eyes. Gus Le Clercq was not there; the pillow and shawl lay upon the floor, where he had tossed them off; but he was nowhere to be seen. What had become of him?

(To be continued.)

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FACETIA.

"Why, Bridget, where in the world have you been in all this rain?" "Sure, m'm, an' I've been hangin' out the clothes to dry."

SWIVELLER: "I think if I were to become blind I should go mad." Micawber: "No doubt. Out of sight, out of mind, you know."

SHE: "Ma says she knows that when we are married we won't live so like cats and dogs as the old pa do." He: "No, indeed. Your ma is right." "Yea, she says she is sure you'll be easier to manage than pa."

"I wish you would tell me," said the insurance agent, "what is your insuperable objection to insuring your life?" "Well, the idea of being more valuable after I am dead than while I am alive is distasteful to me."

A certain minister, while preaching, said that every blade of grass was a sermon. The next day he was amusing himself by mowing his lawn, when a parishioner said, "That's right, sir; cut your sermons short."

PROPRIETOR (average hotel): "Very sorry, sir, but you will have to leave this house at once." Guest: "Goodness me! What have I done!" Proprietor (solemnly): "You said something to a waiter which has displeased the cook."

OLD RICHFELLOW (desperately): "If you refuse me what is there left for me to do?" Sweet Girl: "Well, I read the other day about a rich man who made his will in favour of the woman who refused him, and then went out and hung himself."

MRS. WALKER: "I don't see why the doctors all recommend bicycle-riding. If it makes people healthier it is a loss to the doctors." Mr. Walker: "I know; but they calculate that the sound, healthy rider will disable at least five pedestrians per week."

"I THINK that it is just too horrid for anything," said Maud. "Here I've been standing over the side of the vessel for half an hour and can't see it." "Can't see what, my dear?" asked Ruby. "Why, the equator. The captain said we were crossing it."

MRS. NEWWIFE: "I bought a lovely bottle of medicine to-day warranted to cure St. Vitus'舞. I only paid two shillings for it." Her Husband: "But neither of us has that disease." "I know, but it was reduced from half-a-crown."

An old Scotch woman was dying. The storm was raging without, the wind was howling, and the rain dashing against the window-panes. They were gathered around her bed. "I maun dee, doctor, I maun dee." "Ay, ay. I'm nickle feart ye're gaun." "Weel, weel, the Lord's will be done. But's an awfu' nicht to be gaun skirlin' through the clouds."

A LAWYER had been questioning the witness for some time, and at last got him down to personalities. "Did I understand you to say, sir, that the defendant made certain remarks about me?" "I said so, sir." "Ah! Well, now, sir, from what you know of me, do you believe those remarks to be strictly true?" "No, sir." "Very well. Now, will you be good enough to state to the court what he did say?" "Yes, sir. He said he thought you were a truthful and honest man, and—" "You may step down, sir. That's quite sufficient."

LAWYER (to deaf witness): "Do you know the plaintiff's pigs?" Witness: "Eh?" Lawyer (raising his voice): "Do—you—know plaintiff's pigs?" Witness: "Yes." Lawyer: "How long have you known them?" Witness: "Eh?" Lawyer (louder still): "How long have you known them?" Witness: "Fed 'em all last spring." Lawyer: "Were they all about a size?" Witness: "Eh?" Lawyer (ises on his feet petulantly, and shakes his forefinger at the conclusion of each word at the witness): "Were—they—all—of—a—size?" Witness: "Some ov 'em war, and some ov 'em worn't!"

"Yez may say wot yez plaze, gentlemen, it's not onywhere ye'll be foinding braver men nor th' Irish." "Come off, Pat; it was only the other night I made five of them run." "Was it long catchin' ye, they were!"

WIFE: "You think a good deal of mother, don't you, dear?" Husband: "Indeed I do, love." Wife: "It's very comforting to know that, I am sure." Husband (aside); "Of course it is; but it wouldn't be if you knew exactly what I think of her."

LADY (to cook who has given notice): "But why are you leaving? Is it a matter of wages? I had no idea you were not satisfied!" Cook: "No, m'm. It's not that. (Then after hesitation.) I'm going to get married, m'm." Lady: "Married! Why, I didn't know you had a follower!" Cook: "No, m'm. It's not been long. D'y you recollect giving me an' olday a few months ago to go to a funeral?" Lady: "Yes, quite well." Cook: "Well, m'm, it begun then. I'm going to marry the corpse's husband. 'E said that day as 'ow I was the life of the party."

MANY are the stories told of the great reverence in which the Scotch people hold the Sabbath. Their methods of showing their reverence, however, are sometimes so remarkable as to draw a smile from others, who may, nevertheless, be reasonably strict observers of the "day of rest." A minister of the kirk told an American clergyman who was travelling in Scotland that on one occasion he passed Sunday in a little country inn, and, as the tiny parlour was exceedingly close and stuffy and the day was warm, he started to open one of the windows. "What are ye about, mon?" inquired the landlady, with much severity, entering the room, just in time to prevent the carrying out of the minister's design. He meekly explained that he had thought it would be pleasant to have a little fresh air. "Eh, mon!" said the landlady, with additional emphasis and severity, "ye can ha'e no fresh air in this house on the Sabbath. Six days are now for that, mon!"

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SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales' collection of lace is now worth something like £50,000.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are to be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Portland at Welbeck the second week in next month.

THE cordial relations between Prince Henry of Prussia and his brother, the Emperor, seem now to be completely re-established. Prince Henry has on several occasions recently accompanied the Emperor, with whom he the other day visited Eisen, and during the current month Prince Henry will take over the command of a squadron of three ironclads and a cruiser, with which he will go for a cruise off the Swedish coast.

RUSSIAN leaders of fashion are somewhat disappointed at the plain dressing of their Imperial mistress. The Tsarina has never posed as a leader of fashion, being habitually clad in costly but plain-built gowns, &c. She is certainly not ambitious of earning the reputation of being the "most fashionably-dressed woman in Europe." This is neither understood nor appreciated by Russian ladies of fashion, and the circumstance is the more noticed as the Dowager Empress furnished a strong contrast in her halcyon days, being like her sister, the Princess of Wales, with us, always considered the best-dressed woman at Court.

A NEW Royal gown with high inside fur-lined collar and fur cuffs is now being made by the Court dressmakers, and will rapidly come into fashion for morning wear. It is of cloth ornamented with braiding, and made with a moderately deep square yoke front and back, these yoke sections being arranged over a Princess front and back parts. The yoke portions are handsomely braided, and the front fulness, and the back sections are mounted under the yoke parts, a band of fur neatening the yoke. The Princess back is tight fitting, as are also the two side pieces, and the front is fitted with two darts, the centre fulness alone falling loosely from the yoke. The collar outside is ornamented with braiding, and the fur completes the neck.

ARRANGEMENTS are already being set on foot for the Queen's journey to the South in the spring. She will again go to Clunes, and Princess Beatrice and her children will be at the Villa Lisarb at the same time. From each visit that she has made to the Rivers, the Queen has returned greatly benefited in health, and it is above all things essential that she should be well braced up this spring, in order that later on she may feel sufficiently strong and well to go through the inevitably trying ceremonies connected with the great celebration of her uniquely long reign. It is most gratifying to hear that St. Paul's Cathedral will most probably, after all, be the scene of the great thanksgiving service, which Her Majesty will attend in person. The great metropolitan Cathedral seems the most fitting place for such a great event, and then, again, it will lengthen the route to be taken by the Queen on that day, which is not only greatly to the advantage of the sight-seeing public, but also ensures a more festive appearance for the metropolis.

ON the occasion of the marriage of the Archduchess Maria Dorothea to the Duc D'Orleans, the bridal robe was of gold damask embroidered throughout with lilies, setting her majestic figure off to perfection. There were lilies interwoven in the costly veil, while her fair head was adorned with a diamond crown bearing the Bourbon Lily, which was presented to Her Imperial Highness by the Royalist ladies of France. Amélie, Queen of Portugal, was attired in light green damask interwoven with gold antique lace and splendid diamonds. The Countess of Paris was in grey brocade and historical lace, relieved by the strawberry-coloured ribbon of the Order she wore. The venerable Célestine of Coburg, grandmother and great-aunt of the bridal pair, and the maker of the match, was in a dark violet velvet robe with gold embroidery, and a short white crepe veil hung from her head, bordered by a narrow ruche.

GEMS.

THE best time for exercises is about two hours after a meal.

ONLY about one out of every 1,000 married couples live to celebrate their golden wedding.

SOME of the largest ocean steamers can be converted into armed cruisers in thirty hours.

A MAN can hire a horse in Japan, keep two servants, and live on the fat of the land, all for a little over £4 a month.

WHEN terrified, the ostrich travels at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour, and clears twelve to fourteen feet at a stride.

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STATISTICS.

THE utmost excellence at which humanity can arrive, is a constant and determined pursuit of virtue, without regard to present dangers and advantages.

WHETHER any particular day shall bring to you more happiness or suffering is largely beyond your power to determine. Whether each day of your life shall give happiness or suffering rests with yourself.

LANGUAGE and thought are inseparable, and words without thoughts are dead sounds, and thought without words are nothing. To think is to speak low; to speak is, to think aloud. The word is the thought incarnate.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE BATTER PUDDING.—Pare and core six apples and place them closely together in a buttered dish. Sift over them half a cup of sugar, adding a cup of water; cover and bake until tender. Remove, and when partly cool, pour over them a batter made of five large tablespoonsful of flour, a pinch of salt, and one teaspoonful of baking powder sifted together. Into this mixture stir one tablespoonful of melted butter and a pint of milk, afterwards adding three well beaten eggs. Pour the mixture over the apples, return to the oven, and bake quickly. Serve with a liquid sauce.

MUTTON AND RICE.—One pound mutton, quarter pound rice, two onions, three breakfast-cupsful water, one teaspoonful salt, half teaspoonful curry powder, one tea spoonful dripping. Put the dripping in a stewpan to get quite hot; chop up the onions and fry them a little, then fry the mutton all round, then put in the water and curry and salt, and let it boil gently for half an hour. Then have the rice washed well, sprinkle it round the meat, put on the lid, and let it all cook for half an hour longer. Do not stir it at all, and let it cook slowly. Put the meat on a dish, and the rice round it. This is a very economical and savoury dinner.

VICTORIA TARTLET.—Make a little thin paste with quarter pound of flour and two ounces of butter or one and a half ounces of sweet dripping, half teaspoonful of baking powder in the usual way. Roll it out thinly, and line twelve paty pans with it. Then make the following mixture: Put in a basin two whole eggs and quarter pound of white sugar, and beat with a whisk or two forks for quarter of an hour; add half teaspoonful of milk and mix with a spoon, then stir in quarter pound of flour, half teaspoonful baking powder, and half teaspoonful lemon essence; mix gently. Put a little nice jam in each paty pan and the mixture to three quarters fill it. Put in the oven and bake twenty minutes, or till ready.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LIONS and tigers are too weak in lung-power to run more than half a mile.

MUSHROOMS grow wild in all parts of the earth, and are as plentiful in Siberia as in the tropics.

ROAD SPRINKLING carts were in use in Britain in 1748. They were sent before the King's carriage.

BEDROOM windows should never be entirely closed if the person occupying the room is strong.

No human head was impressed on coins until after the death of Alexander the Great. All images before that time were of deities.

THE south-west wind is the most prevalent in England. It blows on almost twice as many days in every year as every other wind.

THE opening of the door of a warm room in Lapland during the winter is immediately followed by a miniature snowstorm in the room, the condensed moisture falling in flakes.

THE muscles of the human tongue are more complicated than those of any other organ, and cross and interlace each other in such a manner as to permit an almost endless variety of motion.

ONE of the attractions of New York is the monkey market, where hundreds of sailors replace every week to dispose of monkeys and parrots which they have brought from tropical countries. Twenty shillings will buy a parrot that will talk half-a-dozen languages.

THE use of iron in architecture is not so new as people are accustomed to think. At Delhi is a forged iron column sixty feet high. It is sixteen inches in diameter at the base and twelve inches at the top. Its weight is estimated at about seventeen tons. From records extant it is reasonably certain that it was in existence 900 years B.C.

AT the public library in Macon there is a barometer made simply of a thin strip of cedar and a thin strip of white pine, placed together and stuck perpendicularly in a base rest of wood. When it is going to rain the strips bend down, and when it is to be dry they stand rigidly stiff and straight. It is said to indicate coming storms unfailingly.

IN the Sudan, a slave who considers himself ill-treated has a right, not to freedom, indeed, but to select a master more to his liking. To be safe from recapture and punishment, the bondman has only to escape from his old home by night, go immediately to the house of any man to whom he chooses to belong, and, arriving there, snap a bit of cartridge from the ear of its sleeping proprietor. That accomplished, the master is settled; neither the old nor the new master can question the transaction's legality or binding force.

IT is often the case that it is necessary to preserve the body of some person for some special purpose, and for this the services of the embalmer are called into requisition. Much dissatisfaction is sometimes expressed because the preservative process is not all that is promised. While the embalmer is largely responsible for failures, it must not be forgotten that there are widely different climatic conditions, and that processes that were and would now be eminently successful in Egypt and other exceedingly dry climates, would not answer at all with us. The methods most popular in this country are injecting chemicals into the large arteries and filling the large cavities of the body with the fluid. Creosote, pyrolytic acid and similar substances are employed for this purpose. When properly performed this operation is of great use; but imperfectly done, it is worse than nothing at all, for there is an enormous bill to pay, and decomposition sets in almost as soon as though there had been no attempt at preservation. By this means the friends are disappointed, the estate is forced to pay an unjust claim, and there is also danger to health in trying to keep a body that may be in an advanced stage of decay. A perfect preservation of this sort is something that is greatly needed.



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